DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 642 EA 020 818

AUTHOR	Brodinsky, Ben; Keough, Katherine E.
TITLE	Students At Risk: Problems and Solutions. AASA Critical Issues Report.
INSTITUTION	American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-87652-123-5
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	116p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications, American Association of School Administrators, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209-9988 (Stock No. 021-00213; $13.95 plus $3.50 postage and handling; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cooperative Programs; *Dropout Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; Labor Force Development; *Prevention; School Business Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Partnerships in Education

ABSTRACT

The 1987 American Association of School Administrators survey on students at risk reported that school districts and administrators are alarmed about increasing dropout rates and are taking action to stem this tide. This report analyzes the problems of at-risk youth and recounts ameliorative efforts throughout the United States. Section A reviews various forces placing students at risk. Societal forces include poverty, the hardships accompanying minority status, and the weakening of home influence. Forces originating with schools include the troubled curriculum, inappropriate academic standards, and the insensitive school atmosphere. Section B describes private- and public-sector efforts to work with schools to help high risk students complete their education and enjoy better employment prospects. Section C explains how to identify at-risk students, outlines holistic approaches, and describes model programs addressing specific school and youth issues, such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and suicide. This section closes by detailing four main approaches to deal with at-risk youth: alternative curriculum, counseling, tutorials, and work-related business partnerships. Appendix A reviews the Committee on Economic Development's "Children in Need" report. Appendix B describes Project Literacy U.S., while Appendices C and D provide a statement and comments on at-risk youth from the Forum of Educational Organization Leaders. Three other appendices concerning international policies, child abuse prevention, and developing an at-risk policy are included. (MLH)

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AASA
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REPORT

American Association of
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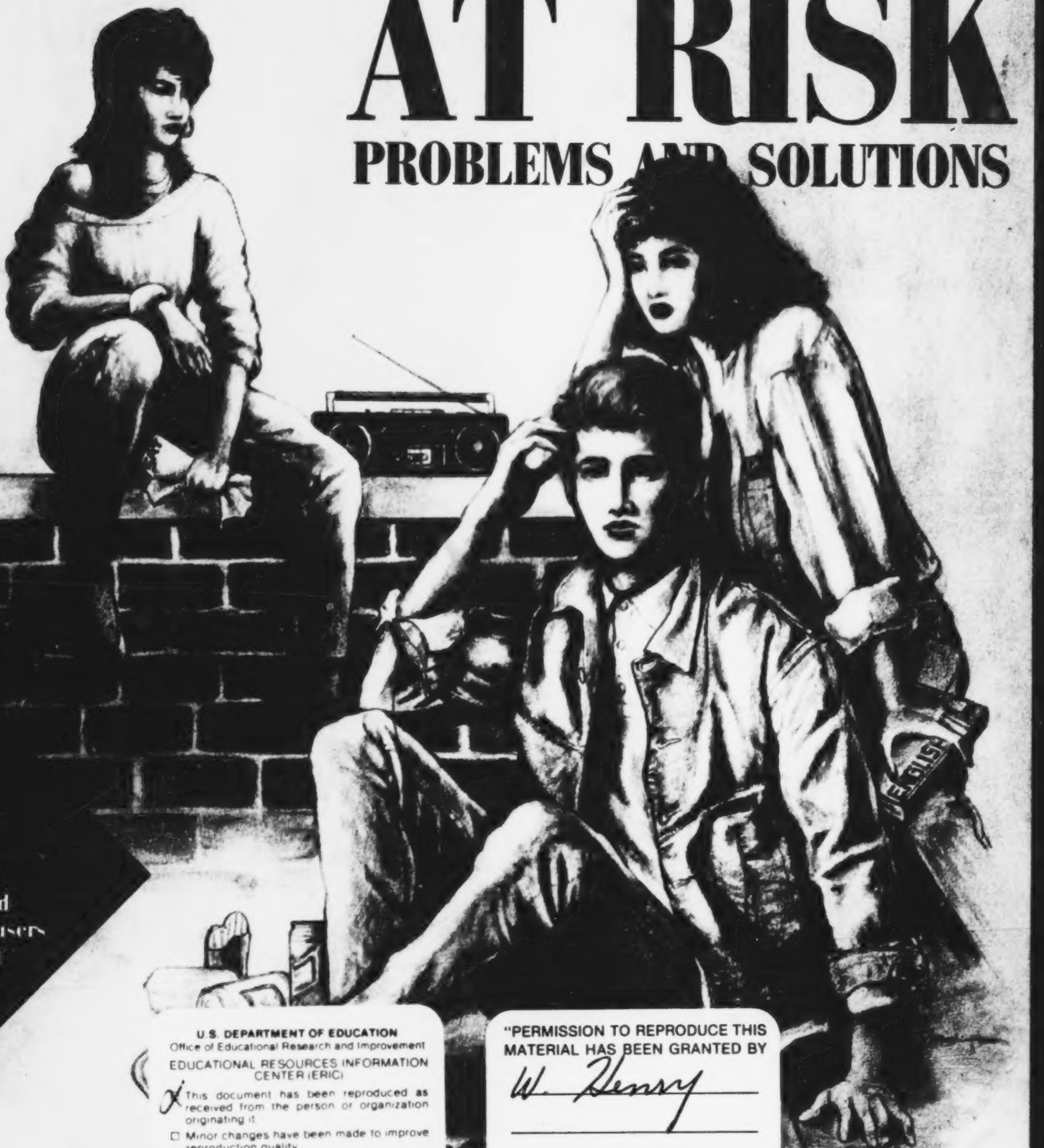
STUDENTS AT RISK

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS



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AASA Critical Issues Report

STUDENTS AT RISK
Problems and Solutions

by Ben Brodinsky
with Katherine E. Keough

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-70257
ISBN Number: 0-87652-123-5
AASA Stock Number: 021-00213
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Design and graphics: Congressional Arts, Inc.

Single copy, $13.95. Two to nine copies, 10% discount; 10 or more copies, 20% discount. Please add $3.50 to orders of $20 and under for postage and handling. Orders for less than $20 must be accompanied by payment in full. Order from AASA, 1801 North Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209-9988.

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Foreword

There is a notion abroad that students at risk are a localized manifestation confined to the ghetto, the poor and, probably, to newly arrived immigrants, legal and illegal. But, fortunately, there is a more widespread conviction that students at risk represent a symptom of disturbing conditions in all American communities and in our public schools. The fact is, the roots of the problem go deep into our social and political structure, and the work of elementary and secondary schools. Unless checked, observers say, the malaise of today's students at risk will spread — and increase — into the next generation.

Students at risk constituted one of the top concerns identified by members of the American Association of School Administrators in a recent study of issues confronting schools. The survey conducted by AASA in preparation for this *Critical Issues Report* brought responses from a broad section of school districts and their administrators. They shared their concerns, their views, their analyses of the problem, and their successful practices as they searched for solutions.

Our thanks go to those who responded to the survey; as well as to leaders in education, business, industry, government, and professional associations who provided additional information through interviews and correspondence.

Students At Risk: Problems and Solutions is the 21st report in the AASA Critical Issues series. It was written by **Ben Brodinsky,** a freelance educational journalist who has written and edited a number of AASA's Critical Issues Reports. The manuscript was edited by AASA Assistant Communications Director **Luann Fulbright,** who also oversaw its production. Reviewing and offering additions to the manuscript was noted educational researcher and writer **Katherine E. Keough,** assistant professor of the Department of Administration and Supervision at Queens College, the City University of New York. Dr. Keough, teamed up with The Communications Support Group, Inc., has produced such outstanding slide/tape presentations for AASA as *A Profound Transformation* and *The Race We Dare Not Lose.* Most recently, she produced a companion slide-tape program to this Critical Issues Report, called *At-Risk Students: The Challenge.*

We trust you will find that this latest Critical Issues Report will add to your insight and endeavors to meet the needs of students at risk.

Richard D. Miller
Executive Director
AASA

Gary Marx
Associate Executive Director
AASA Office of Communications

Preface

Meeting the At-Risk Challenge

Just what are we talking about when we speak of students at risk? At risk. . . of what?

The list is alarmingly long, but students at risk include those who are:

- Not learning to read or compute
- Learning to hate school
- Becoming alienated from others
- Dropping out of school
- Becoming hooked on drugs
- Drifting into crime
- Becoming sexually active too soon
- Getting pregnant
- Becoming despondent and suicidal
- Failing to acquire skills needed for employment
- Failing to acquire understandings needed for citizenship
- Accepting failure as a way of life
- Failing to acquire habits of work
- Drifting into and remaining in poverty
- Becoming dependent on welfare throughout life
- Placing their own children in future cycles of risk.

Responses to the at-risk dilemma have come from both the public sector and the private sector.

We have all read the bittersweet headlines telling how private citizens have taken up the cause. To cite one of the stories: The president of a brokerage firm announced he would pay the college or technical school tuition of 122 sixth-graders in a Philadelphia school if they graduated from high school. Such gestures of philanthropy have multiplied and, now, about 100 similar "I Have a Dream" or "Say Yes to Education" ventures (as they are called) exist across the country.

The motives of private benefactors include their desire "to give something back to the society" which has been good to them, and their distress at high school dropout rates in cities. The reactions of students and their parents have ranged from, "We're stunned" to "This is a miracle" to "I didn't think my child would ever have a chance to go to college. . . ."

Business industries, corporations, and companies have also responded with scholarships and other financial support, special programs, instructional and personnel support to the schools, jobs for at-risk students, and more.

In the public sector, state activity on behalf of the at-risk student is at a high level. In fact, seldom has an educational issue seized the interest and the initiative of state governments as has this challenge.

Under the leadership of many governors, state legislatures are enacting legislation, appropriating funds, and issuing guidelines for the alleviation of the risks facing so many children and youth in school districts across the nation. Wisconsin and Florida have enacted dropout prevention laws, generally considered model legislation. Other states have used their existing school statutes to address the dropout problem and to channel millions of *new* dollars for aiding at-risk students. State legislatures and state education agencies have set in motion *ad hoc* and permanent task forces to develop programs for at-risk students. Further, states have:

- Named state coordinators for dropout prevention.
- Published handbooks and guidelines for local boards of education.
- Publicized exemplary at-risk prevention programs for local districts to emulate.

At the national level, a score of bills dealing directly and indirectly with at-risk students have been introduced — and more will be placed in the legislative hoppers in the future. Some financial help to school districts might come from Washington as a result, but not many observers are counting on much of significance. Congressional committees, in the House and Senate, are studying the condition of children, youth, and their families — including the specific questions of child poverty and the impact on students of such problems as divorce, teenage pregnancy, and alcohol and drug abuse. The committees working on these issues and developing proposed legislation hold hearings and release reports. Perhaps their best work has been to help keep the student at risk in the national consciousness.

It is, however, the local school districts that, in almost unprecendented ways, have turned their machinery, their power, and their resources to aiding at-risk students. Districts large and small, poor and affluent, urban and rural have accepted the challenge.

Working with school districts as partners and allies are foundations, civic and humanitarian agencies, educational associations — the established ones as well as newcomers — and, as already noted, business and industry. The coalitions that have been formed for the defense of our nation's children and youth who stand on the threshold of danger are many — and are strongly committed to the cause.

That commitment is as steadfast as each person's belief in the American way, in a free and democratic society, in a strong economy, in equity, in the absolute worth of each individual, and in the necessity for personal fulfillment for all citizens.

The 1987 AASA survey on students at risk brought evidence that school districts and the nation's school administrators are alarmed — and are taking action to stem the tide of the dropout; the truant; the alienated youth; the pregnant teenager; the young victim of drugs, alcohol, and sexual abuse; and the would-be suicide. With school administrators often in the lead, much is being done. This report analyzes the problems and recounts many of the actions being carried on throughout the United States to address this critical issue.

Section A

Why Students At Risk: The Factors, The Facts

Here's an overview of the forces that place students at risk. . . . Three forces that stem from society: poverty, hardships that come with minority status, weakening of home influence. . . Three forces that originate with the school and educational programs: the troubled curriculum, unsuitable standards for large numbers of students, lack of sensitivity for hosts of students. . . And from within the student, emotional factors that lower student self-esteem.

Society Against the Student

Although living in the most blessed of nations, large numbers of children in school and those who *should* be in school are growing up frightened, confused, embittered, detached, and alienated. It is, in part, a rootless generation, a generation on wheels with few anchors of security, with little knowledge of the past, with few present-day role models.

Even the youngest members of this generation live under pressure and stress. They know about, and fear, the nuclear bomb. They have heard about and are frightened of AIDS; and drugs afflict neighborhoods and shools, devastating the bodies and minds of large numbers of children and youth. Sexual activity among the young results in millions of teenage pregnancies and unwanted births. At times, fear and confusion bring teenagers to the edge of despair and their lives end in suicide.

Two forces with damaging power work upon this generation, pushing them to the threshold of risk and danger. The first is a combination of factors originating in our society, community, and family. The other, equally potent and damaging to students, lies within the schools. The American student who sinks into ever-deeper trouble may be a victim of home, neighborhood, and the schools. Eventually, when the factors add up, these students appear to become a victim of themselves.

The bitter gall of poverty

In a land of affluence, poverty is an especially galling experience for its victims. The poor hear how the "other half" lives — even though the other half is made up of dozens of segments of people, many earning anywhere from $40,000 to $250,000 a year, and others even more. Damage to the self-esteem and dignity of the impoverished is incalculable. But poverty also deprives students of adequate food; proper school dress; safe, clean homes for study; and time to engage in after-school activities.

Administrators responding to the AASA survey listed poverty among the five top causes that put children at risk. The student from a poor home comes to school hungry, often tired or lethargic, unprepared for classroom work, and unable or unwilling to stay on the learning task. Adolescents from poor homes are hampered in their schooling because of long hours worked at after-school jobs, because of conflicts at home due to parent unemployment, and because the student has no adequate space for reading or homework.

Research studies and the literature on poverty reveal one unfortunate picture after another:

- Children of poor families usually start school behind their middle- and upper-middle class counterparts who often have benefitted from better-educated parents and homes with educational toys and learning resources. In addition, most children from middle- and upper-middle income families have access to quality pre-school programs, while only 29 percent of children from low-income families are enrolled in preschool facilities. And fewer than 20 percent of low-income families participate in Head Start.
- It has been noted that dependency on welfare assistance has an insidious effect on many young people. Some believe that a person does not need to be productive or responsible for one's self because someone will bail out the nonproducer.
- Teachers often demand less from poor children and youth. They sometimes alter their expectations on the basis of the poverty line.
- Students from poor homes are more likely to be criticized by others, too, for the clothing they wear, the habits they exhibit, and the speech they use.
- They are more likely than others to have discipline problems and to become subject to suspension and physical punishment.

A growing problem

The facts about poverty are stark. Today, 12.5 million children in America — one in five — are impoverished, up 15 percent from 1970. One of four children under age six lives in poverty. Between 1979 and 1984 (the last year for which figures are available), 3 million additional children were added to the poverty roles.

Black and Hispanic children continue to have the highest poverty rates — with 46 percent of black children and 38 percent of Hispanic children in poverty-level families. However, 63 percent of poor children are white and the proportion of white children in poverty has been increasing at a more rapid rate than that of minority children. Of the 3 million "newly poor," 2 million were white.

Poverty, long entrenched in the South, has recently moved to the Midwest where, according to a Congressional report, "The greatest increase in both the number of the poor children and in the poverty rate for children occurred."

Impact of birth and background

We are a nation of English-speaking whites, largely. But we are also a nation of blacks; we are a nation of Hispanics. We are a nation, too, of the more recent immigrants, legal and illegal, from Asia, the West Indies, the Caribbean, every Latin American country, and many European countries.

Having a diverse population contributes richly to our society. Yet, too often, those who are different in color, background, language, custom, and mores must overcome constraints and hardships unknown to most of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

This is especially true for minority children and youth. For example, black and Hispanic children make up a disproportionate number of the poor. Then there are additional factors that work negatively upon our minority students, such as:

- Most black children do not live in two-parent homes: 49 percent live with one parent and 8 percent live with no parent.
- More than a third of Hispanic children live with one parent.
- Many parents of minority students hold education in low regard; often they dropped out of school when they were of school age.

Another great burden of minority youth is deficiency in the English language and, consequently, poor communication with teachers, counselors, and future employers. *Language deficiency* is the one prevailing characteristic of school dropouts, yet only half the students with limited-English proficiency receive special help. The majority of teachers are not prepared to approach the task of teaching the limited-English proficient student.

The cultures and mores of minority students often make it difficult for them to progress through the elementary grades and to complete high school. Paul Gutierrez, an educational consultant in Vancouver, Washington, explained this point to the board of education of that district in these words: "Cultural norms of (minority students) are often different from those of middle-class teachers. Minority students often do not behave as docilely, obediently, or studiously as their teachers would want. Their behavior is seen as a lack of respect, or a lack of intelligence, leading to increased disciplinary actions and consequent lower images in the minds of teachers. Research studies support the point that teachers tend to rate the potential academic success of (minority students) as being less likely to happen than the success of upper-class children."

As effective schools research shows us, when teachers have lower academic expectations of students, the students are likely to achieve less than when teacher expectations are higher. In essence, lower expectations add to the list of factors that put minority youth at risk.

Meltdown of the home

Once bastion, fortress, and stronghold of the American people, the home is in a state of dissolution for many of our population. Divorce has often taken the father out of the home and left the care of children to a working mother or a mother who is dependent on welfare payments to feed her children. Divorce is one of the sweeping forces that is changing the way we raise and nurture our children.

The number of divorces has tripled in the last 20 years, with between 9 and 12 million children now living in single-parent families. Experts estimate that as many as a third of all marriages will end in divorce or separation. One million children face this crisis each year. And it is estimated that 30 percent of school-age children will see their families dissolved by divorce.

Studies show that children from single-parent families are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems that may place them at risk in school. These include absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, inefficient study habits at home, and disruptive classroom behavior. One result is a higher dropout rate for students from these families.

The longest continuous study of children and parents in divorced families is the California Children of Divorce Study, begun in 1971. The principal investigator of that study, Judith S.

Wallerstein, has said: "Children of divorce represent a hidden population at risk for subsequent psychological problems and economic disadvantage. Their needs and interests are insufficiently understood and poorly served by the legal system, the medical and mental health community, and by the schools . . .

"After following a group of children for some 11 years (the number totaled 113, largely white, middle-class), I found that close to half that number functioned well; the other half functions poorly. . . . Older adolescent girls in the poorly functioning group in this study suffered from low self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness, difficulty in making career commitments, and despair regarding their prospects for establishing lasting relationships. Boys in the poorly-functioning group exhibited strong feelings of rejection, poor self-esteem, and low academic achievement. . . ."

Studies conducted at the University of Georgia are summarized as follows by Dr. Gene Brody, a co-director of the university's department concerned with child and family development: "Different children will respond and react to divorce in different ways. But a large proportion of them will, at one time or another, show high levels of anxiety, withdrawal, sadness and depression, anger, and alienation from peers. We have also observed a lack of persistence in tasks, high distractability, and impulsiveness; and these traits are associated with declines in achievement and social relationships."

The advice for teachers and administrators that emerges from studies of children of divorce is to be alert to such symptoms in children and to understand their origin and cause. Special care and programs are usually needed, not punishment or disciplinary action.

Even in homes not affected by divorce, negative influences on children and youth abound. Parents of all ages — often the young working couple — find little time to devote to parenting responsibilities. They often use the television set as a baby sitter, child watcher, and youth "educator." Fewer and fewer families are sitting down together at the dinner table and elsewhere, sharing accomplishments and discussing problems and solutions.

In the worst of homes, there is drug and alcohol abuse, and child abuse and neglect. Add these factors to parent disdain of teachers and school, and the hope and the possibility for a brighter future diminishes.

Attitude Is No. 1 Defeater of Minority Students, Says Researcher

A student's initial incorporation into this society and subsequent treatment by white Americans are the key factors that affect learning, according to research by John Ogbu, professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Ogbu, who has studied minority children and immigrants for the past 18 years, advised those attending a national conference on teaching at-risk students that it's the student's attitude and his understanding of the universe — not biogenetic differences, socioeconomic factors, or language barriers — that most affect achievement.

Immigrant children whose families voluntarily came to America have a greater chance for academic success than those who have come here involuntarily, he indicated. Those who come voluntarily have high expectations for their life here, and their high expectations carry into the school setting. "They believe that you get ahead through education and what you know, not who you know," Ogbu explained.

Contrarily, those who have been forced to America because of strife in their homeland often view education as a threat to their identity, Ogbu noted, so children are less encouraged to learn.

Ogbu concluded that there is a "legacy of distrust among involuntary minorities that takes more than high teacher expectations to address." This distrust of the system is also prevelant among U.S. blacks who have encountered persistent political and social-related barriers to opportunity, he said.

High teacher expectations, though, are important, he added, but we must recognize different cultural models and related emotional issues and learning blocks. "We must determine who's behaving what way and why."

All too often, too, minority students are mislabeled and misclassified as mentally handicapped. They are assigned to special education classes simply because they cannot understand and follow instructions, or their teachers are baffled and confused by their learning styles. Over-reliance on standardized achievement tests also has far-reaching effects on minority students who are likely to be labeled as failures when the test scores are computed without consideration of the language and cultural backgrounds of the students.

School Versus the Student?

In much of the literature on children at risk, "squeeze out," "push out," and "left out" appear routinely, along with "dropout" and "early school-leavers." These terms suggest that the school is often an unwitting accomplice in the process of a student's dropping out of school.

Success in school work generally depends on reading, comprehending the printed word, and on writing — skills in which the potential dropout is notoriously weak. Success in school also depends on having school programs and curricula that meet students' needs. A curriculum that somehow "works" for the mainstream student often fails the student at risk. These students are particularly unable and unwilling to accept subject matter characterized by academic generalization, definitions, memory work, and recitation.

When school districts survey students to learn why they plan to leave school early, students reply with these typical reasons:

- "I have trouble writing reports."
- "Textbooks are too hard to understand."
- "Too much school work to do at home."
- "Can't keep my mind on school work."
- "Don't like school."
- "I have to take subjects I don't like."

Not keeping up

A condition that prefigures in a student's decision to leave school is the inability to keep up with the requirements of the grade and the classroom. When students fall behind one or more grades, when they flunk a subject, when they are forced to repeat a grade — these students are much more likely to become dropouts.

Several factors begin to operate against students who find school and grade hurdles too high. They suffer blows against their self-esteem. They are overtaken by feelings of inadequacy — the feeling of "I guess I'm just not good enough to be in school. . . ." They believe themselves "too old" to be in a class in which they have to repeat a subject while their friends are in classes ahead of them. In fact, over-age" was the reason cited by 41 percent of Los Angeles dropouts in surveys between 1981 and 1984. A variety of studies have shown that the opportunity to learn with their peers is a strong reason for many students to stay in school. On the other hand, being "out-of-age" with the rest of the class is a strong reason for leaving.

A defeating language barrier

Words, words, words — English words — make up the substance of teaching and learning while, at the same time, American students speak more than 100 languages. The language at a student's home is often not English; and the English spoken in the homes of many other students is far and away not the English useful in the classroom.

Students fail tests, are graded down on their homework, and are marked low in recitations because of difficulty with the English language. The Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C., for example, cites studies showing that 25 percent of Hispanic youth are two years behind at the end of the eighth grade. While poverty and cultural mores may have something to do with this grade retention, failure to master the English language is possibly the most important risk factor.

Students who have failed to master the basic skills needed in learning become discouraged when they tackle tasks and problems presented in the classroom. In short order, many of the students find themselves in the bottom 25 percent of the class. They are prime candidates for dropping out.

One educator's response revealed in the AASA survey spotlights the problem: "Why do these students drop out of school? Because they have given up on school as a means for their success. They no longer believe that schooling will work for them. They disconnect from the school's values and goals. They see a small future for themselves by continuing in school."

"When it comes to late bloomers, the moral is that society should never give up on nurturing its people."

Squeeze-out rules / push-out attitudes

"School is too strict. . . ." "I always end up in detention. . . ." "Teachers are pretty snobbish, I think...." "The principal has got it in for me."

These are among responses from students who had dropped out of one Washington state school district. They are typical of responses made by students in most school systems where there are follow-up studies to find out why students leave early. Time and again potential dropouts say, "I don't like school." And one reason for their dislike is that, "School to me is like a prison — the rules, the guards, the doors locking after the late bell. . . ."

Unable to accept the climate and the rules of the school, many potential dropouts find themselves placed on in-school detention and on suspension lists. The Children's Defense Fund has reported that at least 25 percent of all dropouts had been suspended before they decided to leave school and that another 20 percent had been involved in a variety of other disciplinary actions.

According to school staff members, most suspensions are given for "nonthreatening" behavior — behavior that does not threaten the safety of other students, such as defiance of authority or the use of profanity and vulgarity. Students suspended for these reasons are primarily minorities, a fact substantiated in 1985 in studies of the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics.

Other studies show that black high school students are suspended three times as often as whites. Further, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights has reported that black students are over one-and-a-half times more likely that white students to receive corporal punishment. The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) concludes that "disciplinary actions — whether corporal punishment, detention, or suspension — are imposed disproportionately on minority students."

But school rules and regulations also fall heavily on whites in urban, rural, and suburban schools. Students everywhere rebel when they feel that discipline measures are not enforced fairly or consistently. Excessive use of suspension and expulsion are predictors of heavy dropout rates in a school. Student alienation frequently develops along predictable patterns where you see the student:

1. Unable to keep up with classroom work.
2. Reacting with tardiness, absences, truancy, violation of school rules.
3. Subjected to punishment — suspension, detention, expulsion.
4. Then dropping out of school.

The Student Versus the Student

Threatening forces within

Deep within a student's personal life may lie factors that put him or her at risk. The causes of these factors may arise from the student's home life or school environment, as previously mentioned. Or they may stem from a combination of pressures in the society in which the student lives.

In the large majority of cases, low self-esteem and poor emotional health make the student susceptible to at-risk problems. One study holds that "students who do not have the ability to recognize and deal with their feelings about themselves, or deal with their emotions, assume or adapt to unproductive life styles . . ."

Lack of goals is another risk signal: "Students who lack life goals or career aspirations were found to function at a low level of social integration and school accomplishment." These students, according to the researchers, are "followers without a purpose." Their pattern of conversation usually includes talk about drugs, parties, and getting "high." They may fall under peer pressure, join a gang, and comply with the behavior of the group — cutting classes; being truant; and using and abusing alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

Despite compliance with group behavior, usually unsalutary, the student susceptible to at-risk problems maintains unsatisfactory relations with the majority of his or her peers. Alienation is the most common result — a disconnection from the mainstream of the student body, from family and teachers, and from himself.

Late bloomers

Many of these alienated youth fit into a category some people call "late bloomers." They are the young people who simply don't hit their stride during the years they are in school. While their potential may be outstanding, it is carefully hidden behind a mask of indifference, rebellion, or consuming interests outside of school.

Some late bloomers make it through school and graduate, often with special help at school and elsewhere. While their interest level is low while in school, they later connect with an area of intense interest in their careers, in college, or in life. Through inspired effort, they struggle to make up for lost ground and often live lives that are great success stories.

Studies reveal that late bloomers often start to flower when they discover the importance of education. As one administrator noted, "Ideally, this would happen while they are still in school, with schools doing everyting possible to spark these kids' imaginations. . . . But too often, these youngsters wake up about education after they have dropped out."

What can cause students who have dropped out to discover the importance of education? Here are a few reasons:

- Discovering a potential career that is of high interest but requires an education.
- Getting help with a social or economic problem that has plagued them as children or young adults.
- Realizing economic realities, such as: the cost of a place to live, a car to drive, and entertainment.
- Seeing their educated friends doing things and going places that they can't afford.
- A longing for a greater sense of personal dignity that comes with an education.

Hence, when late bloomers drop out, there is still a good chance that they might drop back in to take advantage of an alternative school program, obtain their General Equivalency Degree (GED), or enter the regular school program full-time. More and more schools are ready to help these students upon their return.

Students at risk constitute the soft underbelly of our nation. They make up "the third world" in education. They are alienated from the mainstream of school life. They are disconnected from their fellow students and from the education offered in traditional schools, in traditional ways.

High School Dropout Rates

The nation's high school students are dropping out in growing numbers, according to recent statistics. The rate is lower than in 1982, but rose in 30 states between 1985 and 1986. The rate fell, however, in 18 states and the District of Columbia; and stayed the same in 2 states.

Rank		Dropped Out 1986	1982/rank
1	D.C.	43.2%	43.1%/2
2	Fla.	38.0%	39.8%/4
3	La.	37.3%	47.1%/1
•	Ga.	37.3%	35.0%/13
5	Ariz.	37.0%	36.6%/6
6	Miss.	36.7%	38.7%/5
7	N.Y.	35.8%	36.6%/6
8	Texas	35.7%	36.4%/9
9	S.C.	35.5%	36.2%/10
10	Nev.	34.8%	35.2/12
11	Calif.	33.3%	39.9%/3
12	R.I.	32.7%	27.3%/28
•	Ala.	32.7%	36.6%/6
14	Tenn.	32.6%	32.2%/17
15	Mich.	32.2%	28.4%/24
16	Alaska	31.7%	35.7%/11
17	Ky.	31.4%	34.1%/14
18	N.C.	30.0%	32.9%/16
19	Del.	29.3%	31.8%/18
20	Hawaii	29.2%	25.1%/34
21	Okla.	28.4%	29.2%/22
22	Ind.	28.3%	28.3%/25
23	N.M.	27.7%	30.6%/19
24	Colo.	26.9%	29.1%/23
25	N.H.	26.7%	23.0%/41
26	Va.	26.1%	26.2%/30
27	Ore.	25.9%	27.6%/26
28	W.Va.	24.8%	33.7%/15
•	Wash.	24.8%	23.9%/37
30	Mo.	24.4%	25.8%/31
31	Ill.	24.2%	23.9%/37
32	Maine	23.5%	29.9%/20
33	Md.	23.4%	25.2%/33
34	Mass.	23.3%	23.6%/39
35	Vt.	22.4%	20.4%/44
•	N.J.	22.4%	23.5%/40
37	Ark.	22.0%	26.6%/29
38	Pa.	21.5%	24.0%/36
39	Idaho	21.0%	25.6%/32
40	Utah	19.7%	25.0%/35
41	Ohio	19.6%	22.5%/42
42	Wyo.	18.8%	27.6%/26
43	S.D.	18.5%	17.3%/47
•	Kan.	18.5%	19.3%/45
45	Wis.	13.7%	16.9%/48
46	Mont.	12.8%	21.3%/43
47	Iowa	12.5%	15.9%/50
48	Neb.	11.9%	18.1%/46
49	N.D.	10.3%	16.1%/49
50	Conn.	10.2%	29.4%/21
51	Minn.	8.6%	11.8%/51
USA avg.		**28.5%**	**30.5%**

— From *USA Today*, February 26, 1988

Major Factors That Put Students At Risk

Factors associated with POVERTY

- Inadequate food, poor nutrition, and consequent dearth of energy for study and school work
- Damage to dignity and self-esteem when impoverished student compares himself or herself with others
- Alienation from main body of students based on economic lines
- Inadequate home facilities for study and homework

Factors associated with ETHNIC/RACIAL ORIGINS

- Deficiency in English language
- Deviation in habits, customs, language, and behavior from main body of students and middle-class norms
- Excessive punishment (detention, suspension, expulsion) brought about by differences in behavior of minority students
- Home backgrounds characterized by poverty, single parent, low value placed on schooling

Factors associated with SCHOOL AND SCHOOLING

- Course offerings inappropriate for students of low academic achievement
- Instructional materials (textbooks) unsuited for students
- Teaching styles ineffective with students
- Traditional emphasis on memorization, recitation, unsuitable verbalism
- Excessive testing and faulty interpretation of test results, especially for minority students
- Demands for higher graduation standards without accompanying provisions for remedial and tutoring services
- Lack of adequate counseling for students at risk
- Inadequate school services — mental health, social services, health services
- Disproportionate application of detention, suspension, and expulsion for students
- Inadequate opportunities for extra-curricular activities to meet the needs of students who work
- Repeated failure in school — leading to more failure
- Lag of one or more years in age and grade level in basic skills and academic achievement
- School climate hostile to students who do not "fit the norm"
- Teacher insensitivity to cultural and social differences among students
- Rejection of low academic achievers by their more able peers
- Failure of students at risk to find meaningful experiences in school

Factors associated with HOME AND FAMILY

- Divorce and its effect on children and youth
- Student anxiety, withdrawal, and depression caused by family quarrels, dissension, and eventual home break-up
- Trauma due to death or other family catastrophe
- Parental apathy for children
- Parental child neglect and child abuse
- Parents' own history of dropping out of school
- Frequent change of domicile, leading to changes in school enrollment — the "family on wheels"
- Negative attitude of parents toward education, schools, and teachers
- Parental overreliance on television to "entertain" children
- Lack of orderliness and discipline at home leading to student tardiness, absenteeism, and truancy
- Parental employment schedules leading to "latchkey kids"
- Lack of cultural resources at home — books, magazines, pictures, music
- Drug and alcohol abuse by parents
- Poor role models in home; no male or female role model in home

Factors associated with STUDENTS THEMSELVES

- Low self-esteem
- Poor emotional health
- Lack of life goals; inability to see life options
- Lack or loss of hope for the future
- No self-discipline
- Peer pressure
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Premature sexual activity
- Alienation from other students, teachers, family, and self.

Section B

Your Allies in Efforts to Help Students At Risk

Across the nation, individuals and organizations in both the public and private sectors are taking an active role in addressing the problem of students at risk. Here's a look at the kinds of initiatives being pursued. . . what the business community is doing. . . what state governors, state legislators, and state education officials are doing. The problem is too big for schools alone to tackle. Allies are a necessity.

The Business Community

Business corporations are donating millions of dollars each year to support the education of at-risk students and here is why: They are finding it increasingly difficult to hire employees with the schooling and skills needed for entry-level jobs.

The New York Telephone Company, for example, reported in 1987 that 84 percent of its applicants failed entry-level examinations that test vocabulary, number relationships, and simple problem-solving skills. Similarly, more than 150 major corporations in the United States reported they must give new employees courses in reading, writing, and computation so they can perform adequately in their entry-level occupations.

Former Secretary of Labor William E. Brock sees this as a "danger signal," saying: "Millions of workers are prevented from getting jobs or moving to better jobs because of their lack of basic competency in reading, writing, and speaking English, and because they have poor math skills and lack reasoning and problem-solving ability."

If all of American business was to provide the training its entry-level employees need in basic skills, corporations would have to spend $30 billion a year. Many corporate executives believe the way to reduce these types of costs and to ensure a large and well-educated workforce is to participate with public education in a partnership to encourage low-achieving students to stay in school.

Some corporations limit their support to schools of a particular city or county. In Boston, John Hancock (along with two smaller firms) recently gave more than $1 million to support local school programs for at-risk students. In San Francisco, the McKesson Corporation underwrites high school science and reading laboratories. In the Minneapolis and St. Paul school systems, Honeywell sponsors mathematics and science activities.

Other corporations prefer to spread their funds over larger areas. The American Express Company offers a high school curriculum in 11 cities nationwide to prepare students for careers in financial services. Exxon distributes its school grants on a national basis, giving first preference to schools that want to improve their offerings for the at-risk student population. Exxon has thus changed its philanthropic focus from primarily aiding education in colleges and universities to supporting education for the at-risk student.

A similar change in focus has taken place at Kodak, which used to spend most of its educational funds for college engineering scholarships. In 1988, Kodak spent the bulk of its $14.1 million philanthropic budget for minority and disadvantaged students at the below-college level. Coors officials also have the at-risk student much on their minds. The company has launched a new program to encourage its employees to volunteer as resource people for students experiencing difficulty.

IBM has helped schools and colleges since 1968. Concern over the large numbers of young people who are at risk has encouraged the company to open its purse wider, as evidenced by its 1987 plan to spend $18 million for job-training centers located in areas with heavy concentrations of minorities and disadvantaged youth. Frequently, the local schools are partners in these training centers.

The at-risk movement, together with repeated public assertions that there is a widespread schooling shortfall among large numbers of students in reading and mathematics, has prompted McDonald's, Gulf and Western, and Gannett to increase their participation in grants-giving to schools. "Corporate self-interest obviously comes into play here," said an official of the Business Council for Effective Literacy (New York City). "Business needs young people who can compute; business needs people who can read."

New economy, new demands on workers

Many know, however, that it is not only business interests at stake. Given changes in the nation's economy, and changing demographics and requirements of the workforce, the United States cannot afford undereducated and nonproductive workers. It cannot afford large segments of the work-age population to be dependent on a social system of welfare whose base of contributors is diminishing, as fewer Americans are born and more Americans are reaching the age of retirement.

In the 1950s, the dropout rate approached 50 percent. But in those days, society was not as concerned about this problem as it is today. Most of these young people left school and entered the labor force fairly successfully, finding jobs that provided a good wage. Our industrial economy needed lots of workers with strong bodies, common sense, a willingness to work, and not much more than an eighth-grade education. This economy created the only nation in the world to ever have a majority of its people in the middle class.

But advanced technology and international competition have changed all of that. An industrial economy built on strength and brawn has been replaced with a new economy built on skills and brains. Computers, robots, quality circles, fewer layers of management, and intense competition have all conspired to drastically change the nature of the factory floor. The service sector — finance, medicine, education, advertising, research, insurance, hospitality, media, retailing, government — has become predominant and much more technical.

The new economy demands people who can "work smart." Even the traditional skilled trades — machinists, electricians, ship builders, millwrights, auto technicians — require more education than ever, because these jobs, too, have high tech components.

Workforce 2000: Work and Workers of the 21st Century, recently published by the Hudson Institute of Indianapolis, Indiana, stated the challenge to education, to business, to policy makers, and to our society this way:

If the United States is to continue to prosper — if the year 2000 is to mark the end of the *first* American century — we must find ways to:

Stimulate a balance in world growth. To grow rapidly, the U.S. must pay less attention to its share of world trade and more to the growth of the economies of the other nations of the world, including those nations in Europe, Latin America, and Asia with whom the U.S. competes.

Accelerate productivity in the service industries. Prosperity will depend much more on how fast output per worker increases in health care, education, retailing, government, and other services than on gains in manufacturing.

Maintain the dynamism of an aging workforce. As the average age of American workers climbs toward 40, the nation must ensure that its workforce and its institutions do not lose their adaptability and willingness to learn.

Reconcile the conflicting needs of women, work, and families. Three-fifths of all women over age 16 will be at work in the year 2000. Yet most current policies and institutions covering pay, fringe benefits, time away from work, pensions, welfare, and other issues were designed for a society in which men worked and women stayed home.

Integrate black and Hispanic workers fully into the economy. The shrinking numbers of young people, the rapid pace of industrial change, and the ever-rising skill requirements of the emerging economy make the task of fully utilizing minority workers particularly urgent by the year 2000. Both cultural changes and education and training investments will be needed to create real equal employment opportunity.

Improve the education preparation of all workers. As the economy grows more complex and more dependent on human capital, the standards set by the American education system must be raised.

These challenges demand an educated workforce. To meet them, schools, businesses, and others must continue and escalate their efforts to work together to ensure that all students — especially those students at risk of dropping out of school — acquire the education and skills they need to become productive, contributing citizens.

> *The quality of education will determine the ability of the nation's labor force to adapt to the changes that will result from new productivity-enhancing technologies."*
>
> — Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future.* Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, 1987.

The State Governors

Your state governor may well be one of the best friends of America's students at risk.

Individual gubernatorial efforts on the problem vary. But as a group, the governors are in the forefront of forces raising the nation's awareness of the plight of at-risk students. And they have a program for action through 1991.

Like their business counterparts; the governors' interest in the at-risk student has a practical edge. The governors want to reduce welfare costs. They want to increase their state's and the nation's productivity. They want to gain competitive advantage for American industry and products in world markets.

Among the barriers to these goals, the governors say, are school dropouts, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and adult illiteracy. The governors want to help "bring down these barriers" (the quoted words are often used at meetings of governors as a slogan).

Driving home these points, Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander, former chairman of the National Governors' Association, has said: "Better schools mean better jobs. Unless states face this fact, Americans won't keep their high standard of living. To meet stiff competition from workers in the rest of the world, we must educate ourselves and our children as we never have before."

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is the agency through which the governors work to improve education generally and, more specifically, to come to the help of students at risk. The NGA's 1985 meeting in Idaho set the agenda for the 1980s. At that time, the governors divided into task forces to study a broad range of questions:

- What can be done to attract, train, and reward excellent school leaders?
- Why aren't schools using more extensively the newest technologies for learning?
- Why are expensive school buildings closed much of the year when children are behind in their studies and many classrooms are overcrowded?
- And the big question — Aren't there ways to help poor children with weak preparation succeed in school?

Among task forces set into action were those on alcohol and drug abuse prevention, teen pregnancy, and school dropouts. After a year's study, the task forces (there were seven) published their findings and recommendations in *Time for Results — The Governors' 1991 Report on Education.*

What the governors see

The governors have their own picture of at-risk children. Here is a glimpse of what they see, know, and accept:

Poverty — at the center of the problem. Poverty is the most significant factor affecting academic achievement and a student's self-esteem — hence it places a student at risk educationally. Child poverty is on the increase.

Single-parent families. The millions of children living in single-parent families face special problems, placing them at risk educationally. Poverty is a critical factor, with the average income of a female-headed household being under $8,000.

Deficiency in the English language. The United States is experiencing the highest influx of immigrants since the 1920s. Whether legal or illegal, immigrants are predominantly non-English speaking, poorly educated, and from Southeast Asia or Latin America. Students having parents with little education, low income, and a language other than English at home are at high risk educationally.

Wobbly start in life. But it is the unsteady and uncertain start in life for millions of children, the governors believe, that shapes and forms the high-risk problems for students in elementary and high schools. While the number of preschool youngsters is increasing at the fastest rate in more than a decade — 9 percent between 1980 and 1984, a majority of the mothers of these children (52 percent) are at work, leaving them to the hazards of inadequate care.

Goals for 1991

On the governors' action agenda, helping at-risk young children to have a firm start in life is among the first priorities. Asked, "Where do we want to be in 1991?," the governors reply that for one thing they want to be deeply involved in a movement that will develop outreach initiatives, "using all community resources to assist young children who have only an absentee parent or guardian as their source of nurturance." The governors want the states to encourage each community to set up interagency machinery for this purpose.

The governors express a strong interest in early childhood education and are "encouraged by research findings on its benefits." Delaware's governor, Michael Castle, is an advocate of programs targeted to "the first 60 months." As chairman of the National Governors' Association Committee on Human Resources, he argues that problems of school failure, delinquency, unemployment, and premature parenting can best be prevented by investing in early childhood programs. Kentucky's governor, Martha Layne Collins, has impressed her colleagues by arguing that it is "easier to build than to repair," and that "it is easier to build successful children than to repair unsuccessful adults." She has said: "Money spent on prenatal care may reduce tomorrow's health care costs."

By 1991, the governors would like to see:

- Kindergartens for all five-year-olds.
- Quality early childhood programs for at-risk four-year-olds and possibly three-year-olds.
- Improved educational programs in day-care centers for preschool children.

Turning their attention to older children, the governors would like, by 1991, major state and local school district initiatives to ensure that at-risk students meet "new educational standards." Here are the governors' four major goals related to these initiatives:

Dropouts in Paradise:

A Historical Perspective

The Sumerians, who established the first civilization about 5,000 B.C. and invented cuneiform writing a couple of millenia later, set up schools ("tablet houses") to teach the young to read and write. Students were called "school sons," and tuition was minimal. But teaching methods were dull and discipline was harsh. The curriculum consisted primarily of copying and memorizing long lists of words and phrases. One result: "Dropouts were numerous," says historian Samual Noah Kramer, author of *Cradle of Civilization.* Kramer reminds us that the Sumerian civilization flourished between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, a land some identify with the Biblical Garden of Eden.

An Awareness-Building Tool

The problems of young people at risk as they relate to the nation's changing demographics and economy are more extensively reviewed in *At-Risk Students: The Challenge,* a special AASA slide-tape presentation published in 1988. Superintendents and other leaders who want to build staff and community awareness of the dynamics of this growing local and national concern, and foster support for implementing more extensive programs that address the needs of at-risk students, will find *At-Risk Students: The Challenge* very helpful.

- Extra help in the basic skills for all students who have serious deficiencies.
- A challenging curriculum for all children.
- Reduced class size for kindergarten and the lower grades. (The governors did not specify the class size, but their documents cite many advantages of small classes compared with larger classes.)
- Alternative programs for all high school students on the verge of dropping out; and programs for students who have already dropped out of school, designed to encourage their return.

The governors have left little doubt that they are serious about helping at-risk students succeed. They added to their 1991 checklist a call for each state to establish a mechanism that will intervene in school districts when progress is not being made with low-achieving students. Such intervention, they have suggested, might first include technical assistance. But if progress still is not evident, the governors believe that a state would be warranted in taking "additional action." This could include removing administrators, declaring the district educationally bankrupt, and reorganizing the school system.

The state of New Jersey was the first to take the lead in this kind of intervention on behalf of public school children.

What the Governors Say. . .

- **Allowing at-risk children and youth to founder in the educational process can no longer be tolerated. For the children's sake, and for the nation's economic well-being, new initiatives must be launched to prepare *all* students for the competition of the 21st century.**
- **We cannot accept the adage that only 50 to 60 percent of all students are capable of academic achievement. We cannot rely on survival of the fittest.**
- **Students need to experience success early in life if they are to stay in school. Being retained one grade increases the risk of later dropping out by 40 to 50 percent; two retentions, by 90 percent.**
- **Children who start out behind often stay behind. For young children, we must provide remedial and compensatory programs that will furnish them with skills necessary for more advanced work at the next grade level.**
- **Dropping out is often a result of non-challenging courses. One study in California showed that dropout rates soared when standards were loosened and students had more freedom than they could handle.**
- **Business leaders stress that students who go to work directly from high school need basic skills as much as those entering college. We must not deny students the skills needed to succeed in today's society.**
- **If, as governors, we want to strengthen the teaching profession, we must work with many allies we never see. We must create opportunities to listen to teachers, principals, board members, superintendents, and citizens.**
- **We have a vision of the restructured school. In that vision . . . inservice education will emphasize observation and coaching in classrooms, rather than just one-shot workshops. . . .**
- **The governors are ready for some old-fashioned horse-trading. We'll regulate less, if schools produce better results.**
- **More time should be spent on initiatives than on regulation. We quote with our approval Ernest Boyer's statement: "Human institutions are renewed by concentrating on what's going right, on what succeeds."**
- **We call our basic recommendations, "The Governors' 1991 Report on Education" because we look ahead. . . . But we'll keep better schools on the front burner beyond 1991, if necessary.**

—Selected from governors' speeches and documents prepared under the auspices of the National Governors' Association

The State Capitols

A closer look at how six states have responded to the challenge of their students at risk. . . . Wisconsin enacts one of first comprehensive laws . . . How Florida encourages local districts to meet needs of at-risk students . . . Maryland places faith in alternative programs . . . In Washington state, counseling, tutoring, and peer assistance are among major strategies . . . Massachusetts districts make imaginative uses of state funds for dropout prevention . . . Illinois supports an array of services for potential dropouts.

WISCONSIN:

The First Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Act

"One of the noblest pieces of school legislation enacted by any state in this decade . . ."

"Although somewhat flawed, this children-at-risk legislation is, nevertheless, grand in its conception and purpose . . ."

"Here is a law that is, and may remain for some time, the model for the federal government and other states . . ."

These were some of the reactions reported in the AASA survey on state activity on behalf of children at risk to a law that has been enacted in Wisconsin. Governors and chief state school officers alike were near unanimity in describing Wisconsin's legislation as "landmark" and as making "the most aggressive attack so far on the problems jeopardizing the education of children."

The legislation was enacted in the summer of 1985, its initial aim being to reduce Wisconsin's annual school dropout rate. The act sought to do this by requiring local school boards to identify children at risk of becoming dropouts and to provide prevention and intervention programs.

The text of the law comes immediately to the question that troubles many educators: Who are the children at risk? Wisconsin's answer is this:

> Children at risk means students who are one or more years behind their age or grade-level group in mathematics or reading; and who are or ever have been one of the following:
>
> - A school dropout.
> - Absent from school for all or part of 20 school days or more during the previous 175 school days without excuses acceptable to the school district.
> - An adjudicated delinquent.
> - A parent.

For some educators who reported their opinions in the AASA survey, this definition, while specific, is too limited. Some point out that Wisconsin's law excludes students who are victims of physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and other drug abuse, and who are pushed to the threshold of suicide. Those who have conducted research on this topic point out that, as defined by Wisconsin, such children represent only a small number of students, preschool through grade 12, whose school attendance and achievement are or may become at risk.

Admitting justification for such criticism, William J. Erpenbach, an official in Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction, says: "The law does not prevent any local board of education from reaching out as far as it wants in its efforts to help children at risk. In fact, our Department of Public Instruction, in Madison, encourages such outreach and is prepared to help all boards of education in their widest endeavors to help children at risk."

What the law requires

Essentially, Wisconsin's statute requires that each school board in the state serve as primary manager for school and community programs serving children at risk. After identifying these children, the board must set in place programs and activities to serve their needs. Upon the request of the parent or the child, the board must enroll the child in this type of program.

Under the law, each board must also appoint a coordinator of children-at-risk activities. With the coordinator's help, each board then sets in motion plans to serve the children at risk. The options are wide. Thus, plans may call for curriculum modifications, alternative programs, remedial instruction, pupil support services, or preparation for work and community services. (see the chart on page 00 for more detail on what this law requires school boards to do.)

"School programs alone are ill-equipped to address the numerous nonschool causes which place children at risk of school and life failure," says Herbert J. Grover, Wisconsin state superintendent of public instruction.

The law does not require, but Wisconsin officials urge, that each school board set up a network activity with community, family, business, industry, government, and other agencies that can serve children at risk both in school and outside of school. The first step in this direction, Wisconsin officials say, is to set up a school/community policy-making council. They suggest that the council should:

- Consist of no more than 15 members ("production levels of councils with more than 15 members are inversely related to the number of council members").
- Be made up of representatives from schools, communities, businesses, churches, service clubs, colleges and universities, vocational-technical schools, youth service groups, chambers of commerce, health and social services groups, and local news media.

The council's job is to "make policy, plan and program." But essentially its job is to search out "providers" that can offer the board of education help for children at risk. One Wisconsin official has described how a school board works successfully with the "providers" this way: If (our) school districts are to achieve greater educational excellence, they must . . . improve their capability to instruct children who are traditionally more difficult to instruct, who may demonstrate little or no interest in achieving in school, who are truant, and who too commonly leave school prior to graduation. These are the children at risk.

One never knows what the providers will come up with that will be of terrific help for children at risk. A private trade school may make time and facilities available for a special course for an employable youth. The chamber of commerce might provide the results of a survey showing which businesses in town will have summer openings. Law enforcement agencies might offer a series of talks for students on drugs. In dealing with providers and potential providers, a few simple rules will help a board of education and its school/community council for children at risk: First, invite participation, rather than demand it. Second, show how the educational success of every student benefits the entire community; and, conversely, how the failure of any student hurts the community. Third, publicize the providers' willingness to take part and show appreciation for the contributions the providers make. "Thank you, thank you, thank you" are important terms in dealing with community groups.

The results

Within three years of passage of the Wisconsin statute, local boards of education in the state generated countless new activities on behalf of children at risk. Equally important, they heightened their concern and raised their goals. Dodgeville, Wisconsin, for example, resolved to reduce its dropout rate to 1 percent. The activities of Wisconsin's local districts cover students having problems with alcohol and drugs, with deficiencies in basic subjects, with truancy, lack of self-esteem, lack of vocational and career goals, with sexuality; and students troubled with emotional problems that drive some of them to suicide.

Wisconsin school boards rely on at least five categories of services for the at-risk child:

- Alternative schools and programs, some new, some reinforced.
- Remedial offerings in reading, math, and other basics.
- Tutorial assistance.
- Individual student plans.
- Large doses of parental involvement.

Growing in popularity are ventures in which the central figure is a "caring staff person," to whom students can turn on a one-to-one basis.

The driving force behind these activities are district at-risk coordinators — a corps of full-and part-time educators who, within the short space of three years, became sensitive and skilled in working with at-risk children and their parents, as well as with school/community councils. Administrators lean heavily on these staff people. At least one district, DeSoto, Wisconsin, has seen fit to appoint not only a districtwide coordinator, but also individual school-building coordinators, all working with an at-risk advisory committee.

Here's a sampling of specific district activities:

Hudson (enrollment — 2,000). Has had success with a school-age parent course in which students explore career choices and learn decision-making techniques and parenting skills, while at the same time having the benefits of a support group of school-age parents.

Norwalk (enrollment — 450). Successfully uses a form for developing an at-risk student profile. The profile records the number of credits a student lacks at specific times if he or she is to graduate; the student's estimate of himself or herself; and the parent's perspective of the student's school progress.

Lake Geneva (enrollment — 1,800). Encourages teachers and administrators to make periodic telephone calls to the student's home ("making sure the calls are as often positive as they are dealing with problems"). In addition, the district encourages teachers and principals to mail parents a leaflet, "How parents can help students stay in school."

Seymour (enrollment — 2,400). Created a "structured study hall" to offer tutorial help to all students at all grade levels.

Superior (enrollment — 5,600). Maintains a Prevention, Intervention, Education (PIE) program for grades 7 through 9 to increase student awareness of alcoholism. Services include individual and group counseling, out-patient treatment, and referrals to out-of-school agencies for help. The board is planning to form an in-school Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group.

Elkhart Lake-Glenbeul (enrollment — 800). "Operation Pride" seeks to enhance the self-image of students and improve achievement, classroom behavior, and attitudes. One teacher is assigned as a mentor during each of the eight periods of the school day. Students report to the teacher's room in lieu of study hall. Attendance is taken.

Neenah Joint (enrollment — 6,000). At-risk seventh-graders get prime attention from school counselors to raise their attendance records and academic achievement. Called "Instep Program," the effort is based on one-to-one relationships.

Approximately 75 percent of the people in Wisconsin prisons are high school dropouts.

Racine (enrollment — 27,000). "Advocacy" is the name and the theme of a venture to help at-risk students in grades through 6 through 8. A caring staff person, called an advocate, meets with 15 to 16 students for 30 minutes every 2 weeks. During these "circle sessions," the staff advocate and students review attendance patterns and examine major problems that may trouble any student.

FLORIDA:

Pilots Turn Into Law

In 1986, Florida's legislature passed the Dropout Prevention Act and appropriated an initial $4.1 million to enable the state and local school districts to carry on a wide range of dropout prevention activities.

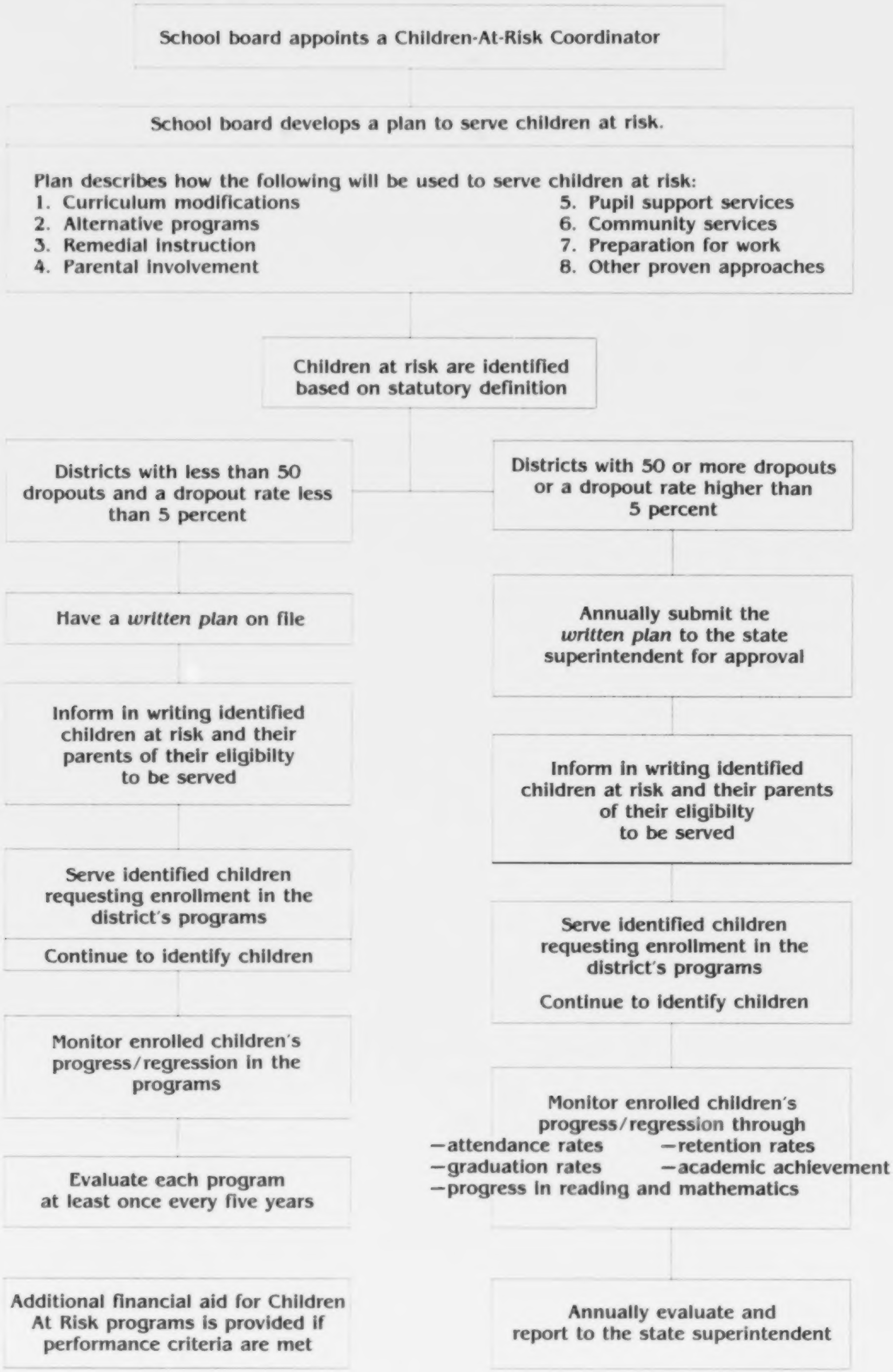
No quick fix

Florida officials say the act was no quick reaction to national headlines about dropouts. They point out that the state had acted to improve attendance and reduce truancy as far back as 1962. In 1970, Florida began distributing funds to schools to hire occupational specialists whose duties required identifying potential dropouts, providing counseling services, and conducting exit interviews of students who withdrew from school. In 1978, Florida authorized funds for alternative educational programs — which now exist in 58 of the state's 67 school districts. By 1984, Florida supported several pilot programs for dropout prevention and, on the basis of their results, passed what has been called "the nation's second most comprehensive dropout prevention act," Wisconsin's presumably being the most comprehensive.

"It is the intent of the legislature," says the 1986 act, "to authorize and encourage district school boards to establish programs designed to meet the needs of students not effectively served by conventional education programs in the public school system." To this end, the legislature set up the Florida Center for Dropout Prevention as an agency to coordinate, promote, and improve dropout prevention efforts, and urged boards of education to apply for dropout prevention grants.

The mandate to superintendents is to submit comprehensive plans, with an emphasis on parental and community involvement and on cooperation with local and state agencies that can serve youth.

Children At Risk Legislative Requirements



School board appoints a Children-At-Risk Coordinator

School board develops a plan to serve children at risk.

Plan describes how the following will be used to serve children at risk:

1. Curriculum modifications
2. Alternative programs
3. Remedial instruction
4. Parental involvement
5. Pupil support services
6. Community services
7. Preparation for work
8. Other proven approaches

Children at risk are identified based on statutory definition

Districts with less than 50 dropouts and a dropout rate less than 5 percent

Have a *written plan* on file

Inform in writing identified children at risk and their parents of their eligibilty to be served

Serve identified children requesting enrollment in the district's programs

Continue to identify children

Monitor enrolled children's progress/regression in the programs

Evaluate each program at least once every five years

Additional financial aid for Children At Risk programs is provided if performance criteria are met

Districts with 50 or more dropouts or a dropout rate higher than 5 percent

Annually submit the *written plan* to the state superintendent for approval

Inform in writing identified children at risk and their parents of their eligibilty to be served

Serve identified children requesting enrollment in the district's programs

Continue to identify children

Monitor enrolled children's progress/regression through
- attendance rates
- retention rates
- graduation rates
- academic achievement
- progress in reading and mathematics

Annually evaluate and report to the state superintendent

—From the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction

Activities that get state funding

Here are four major activities school districts may implement with state funds:

1. Retrieval of students who have already dropped out. Districts are asked to undertake activities that will encourage students to reenter school and obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent.

2. Alternative programs that differ markedly from traditional school offerings and help students "who are unmotivated, unsuccessful, and otherwise identified as potential dropouts.

3. Teenage parent programs that provide students who are pregnant or who are parents with a specialized curriculum to meet their needs. Participation should be voluntary, and students are to be exempt from mandatory attendance for absences due to pregnancy or childbirth if they make up the coursework missed.

4. Substance abuse programs set up by schools or by community agencies. Programs are to emphasize drug and alcohol abuse prevention, while at the same time providing educational services leading to a high school diploma.

To help districts draft their dropout prevention plans, Florida's Department of Education prepared a detailed manual containing the specific provisions of the act to be carried out, as well as suggestions to administrators for carrying out the act's *intent*.

As mentioned, one of the major aims is to identify and bring back to school students who have dropped out. The manual suggests that retrieval activities may be carried on districtwide or by individual schools. "Schools are urged to use media campaigns, exit interviews, follow-up telephone calls, home visits, counseling, and special programs for students who promise to return to school."

In devising alternative programs for potential dropouts, administrators are urged to modify courses as they had been traditionally conducted in the state. "Such modification," State Department of Education officials say, "may include lengthening or shortening the time allocated to in-class study, alternate methods of testing student performance, and the production of interdisciplinary units of study."

An example of course modification is a unit of study that combines English and American history to "form a thematic approach to mastering language arts skills within the context of learning history." The state will approve credits for such modified courses "provided there is no major reduction in content of the two disciplines."

Alternative programs, too, are to emphasize activities that prepare students for choosing a career and for participating in the world of work. Counselors and occupational specialists are to stress employability skills and career awareness for students; and schools may conduct specific courses in vocational areas, and invite business and industry leaders to work with teachers and students on career programs.

MARYLAND:

At Risk — A Top Priority

"We take the position that the students-at-risk issue is now the top priority for the Maryland State Department of Education and, indeed, for Maryland's schools," says David W. Hornbeck, Maryland state superintendent of schools.

Hornbeck has set his staff to work exploring the social forces that place students at risk; seeking precise definitions of children at risk; initiating conferences and studies on teenage pregnancy, truancy, and dropouts; and — above all — encouraging local school districts to search for solutions.

"Although Maryland has many specific programs to meet the needs of the many categories of at-risk students," says Phyllis M. Sunshine, State Department of Education staff member, "local districts carry on three types of effort." They are:

1. Alternative programs

Maryland has great faith in alternative programs for helping at-risk children. As one Maryland official puts it: "These programs often interrupt the self-defeating cycle of student misbehavior and academic deficiency and, in turn, increase student interest in academic and social endeavors. For very young children, alternative programs often prevent the cycle from occurring in the first place. Alternative programs give many students the opportunity to receive remedial instruction and reinforcement in learning and eventually return them to the regular school environment."

State officials caution local schools that alternative school programs can serve only limited numbers of students; can be expensive; and may become isolated. Against such dangers, Maryland urges that alternative programs should be under the jurisdiction of capable teachers who recognize the importance of different learning and teaching styles, and who will get the most out of the alternative approaches. "Further, local administrators should seek to return the alternative student to the regular program with all deliberate speed," says a State Department of Education spokesman.

2. Extended pupil and instructional service

"A desirable objective," according to Maryland state education officials, "is to prevent students from needing alternative schools in the first place." This is the aim of what Maryland school systems call the Extended Pupil and Instructional Services or, informally, "pull outs" program.

Students are generally in the "pull outs" for short time periods, varying from one class period to three days a week. When designated for such programs, students may find themselves in small remedial instruction groups, tutorial sessions, time-out rooms and, most often, receiving counseling on a broad range of topics.

To be successful, according to Maryland officials "pull outs" should provide large doses of counseling that help a student toward self-management. During "pull-out" sessions, students should "feel the warm glow of rewards for appropriate behavior and achievement," and should feel that "the teacher they work with is to be trusted and is a friend."

One caution from the state supervisors to local districts: Teachers who are to work with at-risk students in extended pupil and instructional services need to be prepared through inservice activities.

3. Total school intervention

Maryland education officials say that, if a student is performing poorly, sometimes the problem may not be entirely with the learner. The school may be, in part, at fault. For that reason, quite a number of Maryland schools are examining their total learning environment and how it can be improved or modified as an aid not only to children at risk, but to the entire student body.

"A school building must teem with two types of activities if a total school intervention effort is to succeed," says Min Leong, Maryland State Department of Education. First, staff development projects must go on the year around. Using school-based trainers, these staff development ventures should teach staff members new skills, attitudes, knowledge, and functions. Second, teachers and administrators in a school building must examine how school rules and organization cause problems for the learner. "Here is a challenge for improving the system," Maryland officials say, "by changing goals, practices, policies, regulations, and norms where they need changing."

Such a school intervention effort seeks out the school causes for problems to which children at risk are subjected. The payoff in better learning may be significant. But Maryland officials caution local school districts that these afforts take time and will not work if the staff believes that students and parents are the only source of the problems and that the school is not at fault.

WASHINGTON:

Found Retention Is Possible

In 1984, the Washington legislature appropriated $300,000 to help local school districts discover innovative programs for the retention of students. It was an experiment — for the legislature and the school systems. The legislature sought to determine whether seed money provided by the state would encourage school districts to pick up costs of local retention projects after, say, three to five years of special state support. The local districts had to become convinced that it would be possible to discover methods for retention of potential dropouts using down-to-earth approaches.

After two years of what is known as the High Motivation/School Retention Project, some 25 Washington school districts have a unanimous verdict. Yes, retention is possible with special effort; yes, some districts will not only continue the retention efforts with their own funds, but will do all they can to "showcase and disseminate" what they have learned.

What they learned

At least seven strategies help reduce dropouts and motivate students to stay in school until graduation, according to Washington State officials:

Counseling. Counseling sessions in the 1984 - 1986 Washington experiment gave students opportunities to discuss their problems and to seek help in dealing with them. The medium used was the small support group, meeting frequently and always with the aim of giving the at-risk student a feeling that "here is a group that cares."

Contract courses. Under this plan, the student meets with an instructor to receive assignments and to pledge that he or she will fulfill the contract terms. Frequent meetings to review progress are part of the contract.

Small classes. Washington school districts saw small classes as the means for providing individual attention and interaction among students; and, in addition, as an opportunity for the teacher to know and understand students better.

Tutoring. This strategy provided individualized assistance with homework and helped compensate for lack of parent support at home.

Advocacy. Under this plan, students were aware that a teacher could come to their help when they were experiencing difficulties with regular coursework or with the requirements of the school and classroom.

"Natural helpers." This label refers to the use of students as peer counselors to help other students recover from chemical abuse. First developed in the Mercer Island, Washington, school district, the strategy became widely used in other districts because of its success.

Continuous enrollment. Under this plan, a student may enter any of the above-named intervention strategies without waiting for the school term to begin. This offers the student assistance at the time the need for that assistance is recognized by district officials.

Note: A list of the districts that have used the strategies, with names and addresses, is available from Harry W. Johnson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Old Capitol Building, Olympia, WA 98504.

MASSACHUSETTS:

Inspiration and Funding Dropout Prevention

In Haverhill, a guidance/adjustment counselor travels to students' homes to bring truants to school. . . . Fall River offers 30 at-risk freshmen and sophomores work experience with pay. . . . Lawrence school officials have organized a corps of caseworkers from human service agencies to guide and counsel students in grades 7 and 8 most at risk of dropping out. . . . Brockton public schools maintain a 24-hour-a-day system that monitors, and comes to the help of, students at risk with advocacy and counseling services. . . . Chicopee offers intensive inservice training for staff members working with at-risk students. . . . In Easthampton, an attendance caseworker's major duty is to monitor chronically truant students. . . . Somerville school administrators have assigned a counselor to work almost exclusively with parents of at-risk students in high school to provide support for their children's education. . . . In Millbury, students develop and maintain checklists and daily journals tracking their own attendance and classroom performance.

These are among the many activities carried on in 50 Massachusetts school districts on behalf of at-risk elementary and secondary students. Inspiration and limited funds for the activities come from the state's *Dropout Prevention Grant Program.* Grants to local schools vary from $10,000 to $130,000. They have helped districts create ventures carrying such names as "Project Climb," "Hooked on School," "Pride," "Making It in High School," and "Project Include."

"We hope that the state-funded demonstration projects will inspire districts across Massachusetts to carry on a broad range of activities on behalf of students at risk, with or without state funds," says the State Education Department's dropout prevention specialist.

State education officials hope further that local districts will follow a consistent pattern as they wage war against dropout trends. Their prime suggestion is that school committees (boards) set up a dropout prevention advisory council made up of administrators; teachers; parents; students; and representatives of labor, business, higher education, and community agencies. Together, with administrators, this council should help plan dropout prevention programs that will include counseling and tutorial efforts, programs to improve school discipline and attendance, work-study and cooperative education, alternative education offerings, part-time employment, school-to-work transition, and assistance for pregnant and parenting students.

"Local administrators must do at least two other things," a State Department of Education official said: First, sponsor inservice education for teachers and other school personnel on dropout prevention; and second, review school discipline policies, including attendance and suspension rules, to see that they do not contribute to students leaving school early."

ILLINOIS:

Providing Alternatives and Options for Truants

In Illinois, concern for children at risk goes back to the beginning of this decade. After sponsoring exploratory studies on the problem, Governor James Thompson released (1983) a report identifying children at risk and most in need of state services as:

- Those living in poverty.
- Those born and growing up without a chance to be healthy.
- Those living in families, single-parent or otherwise, without essential supports.
- Those alienated from themselves, their families, and their schools.
- Those growing to maturity without skills necessary for further education or for the workforce.
- Those touched by violence and crime.
- Those who cannot live at home.

These are the same children, Governor Thompson and his staff stressed, who make up the majority of truants and dropouts — and truancy and dropout rates alarmed Illinois officials. A 1984 study showed that approximately 21 percent of all students entering high school in Illinois did not graduate. The attrition rate for Chicago blacks was nearly 57 percent; for Hispanics, 48 percent. Statewide attrition rates were 47 percent for blacks; 39 percent for Hispanics.

When Illinois officials studied reasons for attrition, they found:

- Poor grades prompted students to drop out of school far more than any other cause.
- "Couldn't get along with teachers," and "School wasn't for me," were the next major reasons cited by youth for quitting school.
- Then followed such causes as pregnancy, marriage and plans to marry; the need to find a job and offers of jobs.

"Here is the typical dropout pattern," says an Illinois State Education Department official: "The victims are from low-income and poverty settings, often from minority group backgrounds and poor grades, very low basic academic skills, inability on the part of the student to get help, or sympathy, from school and teachers — all exacerbated by the necessity to find a job or have a baby. The result is separation from school."

The state responds

In 1985, Illinois enacted the Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program. Backed up with an initial $10 million for its implementation, the package offered an array of school services to keep students from becoming chronic truants and from dropping out of school. School districts and community colleges could use the funds for pupil personnel conferences, attendance contracts, parenting skills programs, work-related programs, staff development, and parent involvement. In addition, the legislation encouraged local districts and community colleges to provide students at risk with opportunities to attend evening school, courses for the GED, vocational training, and employment readiness preparation.

Because of the popularity of the programs, the legislature made additional appropriations. By 1987, a total of 58 Truants' Alternative and Optional Education programs were operating throughout the state. These included programs in all the major Illinois cities.

From the Education Commission of the States

A Special Message to Schools

At a press conference in 1987, Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), laid out his organization's views on students at risk and suggested what schools must do for them:

Young people who are disconnected from school, work, family and the values and knowledge that can make them productive adults represent an enormous challenge to this country. We simply cannot afford — morally, politically or economically — to go on this way letting young lives go to waste.

Schools have four responsibilities in this area. First, they must not be part of the problem; they must not be pushing kids out or treating them so they have no recourse but to leave an institution that has no regard for them or relevance to their lives. Teachers, counselors and administrators must become far more conscious of the subtle and not so subtle ways they can start the process of disconnection.

Second, schools have a responsibility to spot signs of risks early on and act to mitigate the risks.

Third, schools must get far better at collaborating wtih other youth service agencies and community resources.

Finally, schools can do the most good by doing what they are supposed to do: interest each child in learning and educate each to the furthest extent.

For Information: Bob Palaich, ECS director of "at risk" youth projects; 303/830-3642.

The Chief State School Officers

The nation's top school leaders, those who head their state's education efforts, have joined together through their professional organization to become advocates for at-risk students. Their organization, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), has studied and become vocal about what's needed to address the problem and why. It has outlined plans and activities that must be undertaken if we are to meet the needs of students at risk.

What the Chiefs see

The state education leaders believe that the nation's public schools have failed to adequately meet the educational needs of most low-income, minority, and limited-English-proficient students, and children and youth who are otherwise disadvantaged. "Even as the reform movement calls for raising school standards, a growing number of young people are at risk of school failure — for them there are few assurances that they will become effective and productive citizens," CCSSO officials lament.

Inadequate government responses. The Chiefs also do not hesitate to say that state and federal responses to the educational needs of at-risk students have, thus far, been inadequate. While acknowledging the categorical aid programs and special budget items that federal and state government have enacted and supported, the Chiefs point out that, with one exception, "these programs depend upon the vagaries of annual commitment of federal and state legislators.

Major federal responses to students at risk include Chapter 1, the Bilingual Education Act, and the vocational education acts. At the state level, 20 states have enacted compensatory programs, 16 have provided funds for bilingual education or English as a second language, and 23 have initiated early childhood education programs. Some states have begun dropout prevention initiatives. But only once have courts, some states, and the federal government made a total commitment to a group of school-age youngsters with greater educational needs than the average elementary and secondary school students. This has been for the disabled, those whose right to education was mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Act. This act, P.L. 94-142, sets forth requirements that state and local education agencies must meet as a condition for federal funding. Among the conditions are "specially designed, individualized education plans" for every disabled child.

What is needed. The Chiefs suggest that the Education for All Handicapped Act can be used as a model. Educators should develop "generic, nonfiscally-based state policies and programs" for the non-handicapped students at risk of school failure. Such a permanent entitlement would free educationally disadvantaged students from the "annual and capricious changes in state funding priorities for education," they believe.

Making a dream real

To help meet the noble aspirations stated by the CCSSO, the organization has set up a work group to help in the development of a model state statute "to guarantee that all at-risk students receive appropriate educational services." The

CCSSO does not plan, however, the push for a ready-to-be-enacted law all at once. Rather, it plans to develop options for "starter" or phased-in entitlement programs.

But even before a first draft of the model statute can be attempted, drafters must resolve at least three major issues:

- How should at-risk children and youth be defined?
- Should at-risk students be provided programs and services as individuals or as groups?
- What should be the essential elements in a model entitlement program?

Interlaced in these issues are hosts of other questions. Here are a few:

- Who are the children most at risk of school failure whose needs are not being met?
- Should there be one definition for children age six and below and another definition for older children?
- At what time should school performance become a measure of at-riskness?
- What measures of at-riskness are appropriate — lag in academic skills, chronic attendance problems, limited English proficiency, chronic behavior problems?
- Is it best to serve "categories" of students or to create schools for large concentrations of at-risk students?
- Should needs assessment play a role in identifying students to be covered by an entitlement statute? Should both individual student and school needs be identified?
- What kind of planning document should a local school district be required to submit to state education officials to qualify for entitlement help?
- What kind of technical assistance should a state education agency provide local school systems?
- How should the entitlement statute require states to hold local systems accountable for appropriate educational results?
- What means should be provided to parents to assure them that their at-risk children's needs are identified and met?

These — and scores of similar questions — will require months, possibly years, of study. Answers to the questions are basic to the development of a model entitlement measure to be laid before Congress, and the development of such a measure is CCSSO's major concern. To get it done, CCSSO will mobilize the chief state school officer in summer institutes and in work and study groups for two or more years.

Tasks to tackle

Three other tasks will engage the time and attention of CCSSO at least until 1990:

- Developing model state statutes on at-riskness.
- Identifying programs and practices from across the nation that have been successful in responding to the needs of at-risk students.
- Improving collection and reporting of dropout statistics. The job here is to set up definitions and criteria to be used by all states in collecting facts about dropouts.

Help from the Regional Laboratories

School leaders will be able to get more help with solving at-risk problems from the country's nine regional educational laboratories, thanks to a collaborative effort the labs initiated in the fall of 1987.

The main goal of the labs' collaboration, in fact, is to enhance the capabilities of each laboratory to respond to schools' requests for information and assistance. First steps have included the exchange of information and resources, as well as building closer ties with national organizations, such as the National Dropout Prevention Network and The National Dropout Prevention Center. The information exchange is focused in three areas: promising programs, useful products (papers, published articles), and resources for technical assistance (consultants, training programs). According to one source: "The purpose isn't simply to expand the knowledge and information base of each lab, but to *screen* submissions carefully so that only the best programs, products, and consultants across the nation are included."

One of the first products of the collaborative effort is a sourcebook that has been called "a gold mine of information." It includes everything from summaries of papers on effective remedial math instruction to descriptions of school- and community-based dropout prevention programs. As a next step, the labs are considering converting the sourcebook into an electronic database that can be accessed not only by the laboratories, but by others working with at-risk youth.

The project is being coordinated by Larry F. Guthrie at the Far West Laboratory in San Francisco.

Interview with an Advocate for Students At Risk

During the past several years, a number of champions have arisen on behalf of the at-risk student: state governors, industrialists, foundation officials, and educators at local, state, and national levels. One who has spoken up vigorously and acted decisively is William F. Pierce, former executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This organization (established 1927) is made up of the nation's chiefs of state departments of education. It is an influential group, respected in Congress and regarded with esteem by educators and others alike in all parts of the country.

When AASA learned that Dr. Pierce decided to leave his post (he joined the Hudson Institute, a "think tank" in Indianapolis) to give more attention to the at-risk student, we had good reason for probing his views. The interview that follows is the result.

REPORTER: Isn't "student-at-risk" becoming a catchword, a political slogan in some places? Can we assume that the vast majority of students are *not* at risk and that they are making satisfactory progress toward their educational and life goals?

PIERCE: No, not the *vast* majority. It is probably true of a majority of students who are white, come from middle-class families with adequate incomes, live in suburbia, in a Dick-Jane-Spot environment. They are doing well. Things work nicely for them. But they do not constitute the whole of this nation's student body.

REPORTER: Then what is your estimate of the number of students who may be at risk?

PIERCE: A good guess would be around 40 percent. Actually, I see this group as a "third world" in education — underdeveloped, mired in poverty, and needing help.

REPORTER: Can you elaborate this point?

PIERCE: Well, let's look at the changing demographics of the school population. The minorities in our schools are growing steadily and heavily. In some school districts, for example, Hispanics outnumber all other students. This trend will continue as more and more people from all over the world find a home in the United States. By the year 2000, one of every three Americans will be a member of what we now call the minority. And the greater the minority populations, the greater the trends toward students being vulnerable, being placed in danger in a highly volatile society. Not only are minority student dropout rates higher, but their school performance often falls far short of the performance of non-minorities. And this is happening at a time when the United States needs all the resources we can muster — intellectual, scientific, inventive, managerial. The international competition from Japan, West Germany, Korea, and other nations will increase. We cannot maintain a high place in world industry and trade, nor a high place in domestic prosperity, when 40 percent of our students aren't getting the education they need — and, in fact, aren't "with it."

REPORTER: But we've always allowed large segments of our student population to bypass the schooling they needed.

PIERCE: That's true. We've swept them under the rug. We took the attitude, "If they can't make it, that's their problem. Let'em suffer." As the 21st century comes closer, we can't afford, we don't dare, to continue with that attitude. And we've had enough rhetoric about the problem. In fact, I sense that we are now ready to move decisively toward policy and programs with regard to the alienated, or disconnected, student.

REPORTER: Do you see a chance for success in this movement of coming to the aid of the student at risk?

PIERCE: Yes, I do. And one reason is that we now have the technologies for doing so.

REPORTER: If you mean such things as audiovisual aids and television, we've had these for some time now without any appreciable impact for the improvement of learning.

PIERCE: Those so-called technological aids of the past were largely passive in nature. What I am talking about now are the larger technologies, with the computer at their center, which are interactive. There is a big difference between students sitting and watching a movie or TV and students being actively involved in learning with the aid of good teachers using sophisticated teaching systems.

REPORTER: Have you thought about which subgroups in the at-risk student population pose the greatest challenge for the administrator? Is it the potential dropout? The pregnant teenager? or possibly, the —

PIERCE (interrupting): Let me suggest a different type of grouping. I see three categories of at-risk boys and girls:

First, I see the very young — even preschoolers. They are the ones who are on the way toward becoming at risk. They are sometimes the children of children, the unwanted pregnancies of teenagers. They have been caught in the cycle of poverty. They may, in fact, be in the second or third generation of single mothers on welfare.

Second, there are the students who have already entered school and are beginning to show the effects of their background, their poverty, their deficiencies in nutrition, in language, and in proper health habits. They are beginning to show symptoms of school failure, of alienation. There is trouble ahead for these kids unless school, home, and community can act to help them.

Third, there are the students in the later grades who have already been hurt or damaged by unconcerned schools or home or society. They are the bored, the unchallenged, the depressed. They come to school late, listlessly, or not at all. They may have a record of disruptive behavior, of vandalism and violence. They may seek relief in sexual activity, in smoking, drinking or drugs. Or they may even look to suicide as a way out.

REPORTER: But they are salvageable —

PIERCE: Yes, probably, or certainly. But we have to work at it.

REPORTER: And the first thing to do —

PIERCE: Is to change our attitudes toward the young. Adults in our country — and this includes parents, teachers, administrators, legislators — have largely been apathetic toward the young. We have abandoned our children to the television set, to the fast-food place, to the automobile, to the movie theater, to the street. We'd all be hard put to find evidence that we value kids. On the contrary, it would be easy to find evidence that adults lack appreciation for the young.

REPORTER: A few specifics would help here —

PIERCE: We have few child advocates in this country. Laws on behalf of children are scarce at the state levels and the federal level. Think of the measures we have to provide security or to protect the elderly — and then think what we have for children. The contrast is sharp. The one memorable piece of legislation we have for children is that providing for the handicapped.

REPORTER: And the one providing for school lunches?

PIERCE: That, too. But we need much, much more.

REPORTER: Looking specifically at the elementary and secondary schools, what factors in these institutions contribute to the danger points for students?

PIERCE: Lack of diversity or, to put it another way, boring consistency. We still don't recognize that we learn differently; or, if we say we recognize it, we don't do much about it. What needs to be done is to provide flexibility, to offer alternatives. Just look at the popularity of the magnet school. Parents stand in line, or undergo long waiting periods, for a chance to enroll a child in an alternative or magnet school. Certainly, the child at risk is, or should be, the first candidate for these types of school offerings.

It is through such measures as magnet schools — as well as intensive counseling and day-to-day attention — that we should communicate to the students our attitude of concern. We should make it clear to them, "Look, we value you — your mind, your health, your future. We won't let you fail. We'll help you succeed. We'll remove whatever school barriers there are that keep you from succeeding."

Unfortunately, in too many schools and in too many cases we keep up the old barriers, we create new ones against the child. We value rules, regulations, and bureaucratic policies more than we do the students.

REPORTER: On this point, let me read a quotation that I took down verbatim during a speech made at a recent national meeting. The quote reads: "As long as our schools continue with their present curriculum and organization, we shall continue to place our students at risk, not only in this generation but in generations to come." What is your reaction?

PIERCE: Absolutely true. It is certainly a true statement with regard to the curriculum. I am a little less concerned about the "organization" of the school, because we're not quite sure how to restructure our schools. But we can say definitely that the curriculum needs thorough overhauling.

Let me take this a bit further. Eventually, we'll reach the day when the schools will devise an instructional plan for each individual student. When that day comes, we shall have taken the most significant step for meeting the educational needs of most students — whether low income, minority, limited-English proficiency, or disadvantaged in other ways.

REPORTER: You have observed, and worked in, education at the state level. How effective have the states been in acting on behalf of the at-risk student?

PIERCE: The state governors, as we know, have taken a strong lead in this work. The governors have seen the linkage between education and the economy, between education and global competition. So, for very practical reasons, the governors have taken vigorous action to strengthen education and to see to it that all students are brought into the mainstream of learning.

The state legislatures, the state education agencies and their chiefs have been affected by the enthusiasm of the governors. But, of course, we're only at the beginning of any comprehensive plans for the at-risk student.

REPORTER: But a beginning has been made?

PIERCE: Oh, yes. Wisconsin has put into place an interesting and, up to now, a unique program for at-risk students. AASA members would do well to get to know that plan. In addition, Florida, Illinios, Ohio, Michigan, and Arkansas are working out model plans to reduce dropout rates. You'll soon see that more states will provide strong leadership in this area.

REPORTER: What can we expect from the federal government? From Congress?

PIERCE: Very little. As long as the nation carries this huge deficit, Congress will be inclined to hold back, to let the states carry the burden.

REPORTER: And, of course, the local school districts —

PIERCE: Of course, the local school districts! Unless they act on behalf of the at-risk student, very little can happen.

Other Friends, Allies

In preparing this AASA *Critical Issues Report,* the authors have selected a limited number of associations making more than ordinary efforts on behalf of students at risk, they include:

American Association of School Administrators, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209-9988; 703/528-0700.

Committed through policies, publications, and programs to aid students at risk. ***Major ongoing activities:*** prevention of unplanned pregnancy among teenagers through "Teen Outreach" program, with the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc.; sponsorship, with Quest International and the Lions Club International, of more than 140 institutes on early adolescence. ***Recent publications:*** *Self-Discipline — Helping Students Succeed,* a 16-page leaflet linking student self-discipline with self-esteem and success; *Teenage Pregnancy — Developing Life Options,* a 24-page booklet defining the scope of the problem and what is and needs to be done about it; and *Why School Health?,* a 16-page publication addressing the myriad of adolescent health problems, and strategies and programs to address them. Other publications and issue papers address child and sexual abuse, AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage suicide, keeping students in school, and more.

Appalachian Regional Commission, 1666 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20735; 202/673-7866.

Considers dropout prevention its major concern. ***Recent activity:*** Distributed $500,000 in grants to support local dropout reduction efforts within the 13-sate Appalachian region. Grants are awarded by the Commission's Human Resources Division.

Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., 660 First Ave., New York, NY 10016-3241; 212/638-1515.

Teen Outreach program takes a holistic approach to helping students avoid premature sexual activity and pregnancy.

Children's Defense Fund, 122 C St. N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202/628-8787.

Spends half of its time lobbying Congress to enact legislation favorable to poor children. The other half is devoted to research to discover effective programs for students at risk. The Fund expects to have two research reports in 1988: the first will address what state department of education policies will best serve students at risk; the second will focus on what local districts can do in the middle grades to prevent dropouts.

Cities in Schools, Inc., 1023 15th St. N.W., Washington, DC 20005; 202/861-0230.

Operates in 20 cities (for example, Atlanta; Miami; Philadelphia; Charlotte, N.C.; and Allentown, Pa.). Helps "coordinate and integrate human resources" on behalf of students at risk.

Committee for Economic Development, 477 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022; 212/688-2063, and 1700 K St. N.W., Washington, DC 20006.

Nonprofit, nonpartisan (and quite prestigious) group that "seeks solutions to pressing social and economic issues." Composed of top business executives and other leaders. ***Latest activity:*** publication of *Children in Need — Investment Strategies for the Educational Disadvantaged* which urges businesses to join in partnership with schools "to improve public schools and to rescue millions of students from failure." (For major recommendations, see Appendix A.)

Council of Chief State School Officers, 400 N. Capitol St., N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202/393-8161.

In 1987, issued a major policy statement reaffirming the Council's commitment to students at risk.

Council of Great City Schools, 1413 K St. N.W., Washington, DC 20005; 202/371-0163.

The 43 superintendents of the nation's largest cities are mobilizing their resources on behalf of children at risk. ***Recent activities:*** The Council's annual (1987) fall conference dealt with increasing opportunities for children at risk; how to use technology for the disadvantaged and troubled student; and reducing placement of minority children in special education.

Forum of Educational Organization Leaders, Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, Moderator, c/o Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202/822-8405.

Formed in 1974, this consortium of top leaders from 11 major, national educational associations meets frequently to explore important issues facing the nation's schools. ***Most recent activity:*** Issued a statement on at-risk youth, delineating the problem and calling for policy and funding action. (See Appendices C and D.)

Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington,DC 20036; 202/822-8405.

"Promotes problem-solving strategies in education." ***Recent publication:*** *Dropouts in America: Enough Is Known for Action,* a 69-page report for policy makers on problems of "pushouts, stopouts, leftouts, truants, early school-leavers, and other students at risk."

National Association of School Nurses, Box 1300, Scarborough, ME 04074; 207/883-2117.

Its major concerns: Teenage pregnancy, AIDS, nutrition, and overall health of students. ***Recent activity:*** issued (in cooperation with NEA and AASA) "Recommendations for School Districts Regarding Substance Abuse by Students." Items deal with identifying students with drug or alcohol problems, devising referral procedures, providing counseling services, and formulating disciplinary actions.

National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 7981 Eastern Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910; 301/565-0333.

The national organization and its state affiliates can help school districts with insights into the social forces that affect all students, and especially those at risk.

National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210.

A major concern: implementing dropout prevention and recovery programs through vocational education. Has conducted workshops and seminars on this topic.

National Dropout Prevention Center, 393, College Ave., Clemson University, Clemson, S.C. 29634-5111; 803/656-2599.

Established in 1986 to help support and coordinate dropout prevention efforts throughout the nation. ***Major goals:*** to raise awareness of the public to the dropout crisis, to form close ties with dropout prevention initiatives all over the country, to keep up-to-date information on programs and statistics, and to be a major source of future planning on dropout prevention. The Center's overriding objective is to ensure that by the year 2000 every youth will earn a *valid* high school diploma. ***Recent activities:*** Printed the only directory of persons involved in the dropout arena; publishes a quarterly newsletter; responds to over 200 inquiries each month for information and assistance.

National Dropout Prevention Network, 1517 L St., Sacramento, CA 95814; 916/443-0786.

Accepts members at fees ranging form $25 to $75 a year. ***Mission:*** "To provide current information to educators and others about what works in dropout prevention." ***Among services planned or in place:*** a national newsletter, speakers bureau, linkages with dropout practitioners, bibliographies, and workshops.

National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1201 16th St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202/822-7840.

Set up by the National Education Association. ***One of its aims:*** "To help cut the national dropout rate in half by 1990." Its means for doing so is through grants to local NEA affiliates for dropout projects. ***Recent activity:*** Six grants to local associations in Arizona, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

National Governor's Association, 444 No. Capitol St. N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202/624-5300.

See this chapter for detailed information on this organization's activities.

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), along with Capital Cities/American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. (ABC), 4802 Fifth Ave., Pittsburg, PA 15213; 412/622-1380.

Are tackling illiteracy with a comprehensive program, Project Literacy U.S.: PLUS. (See Appendix B.) ***Recent Activity:*** In 1987, expanded the program to address inter-generational illiteracy — to break the cycle of illiteracy — by identifying and teaching reading to the illiterate parents of school-age children.

Quest National Center, 6655 Sharon Woods Blvd., Columbus, OH 43229; 614/587-2800.

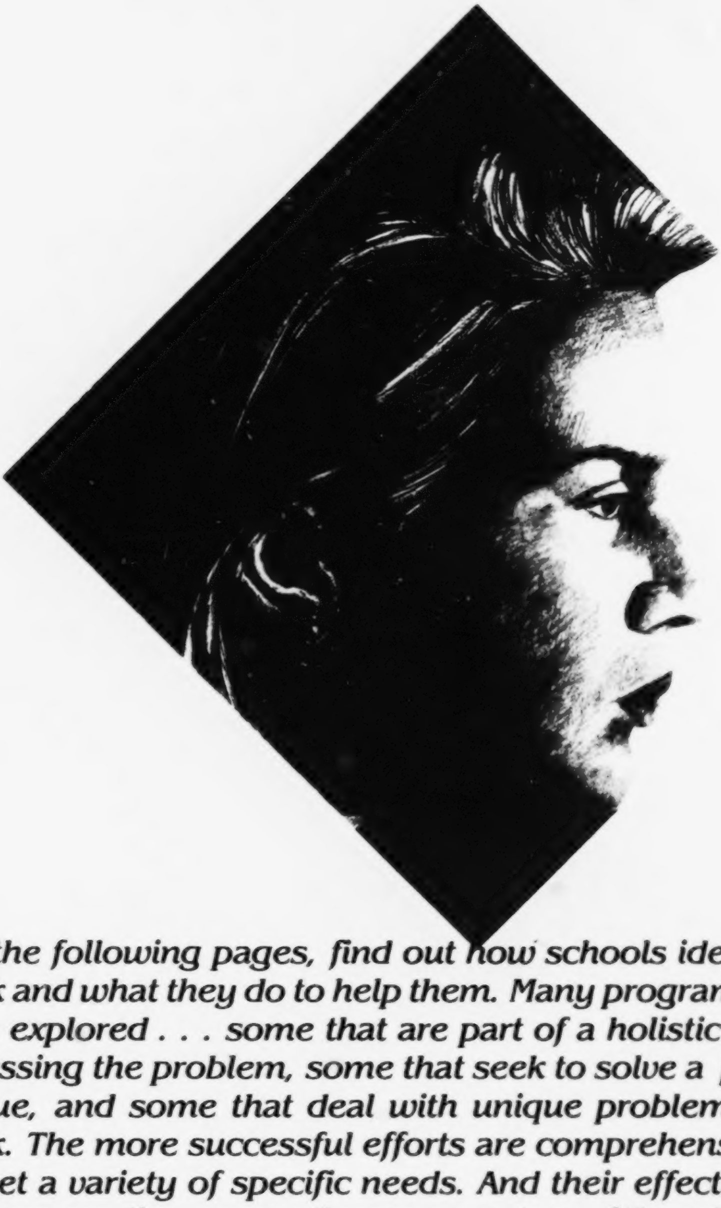
Has developed several programs aimed at helping youth develop positive attitudes, values, and behaviors. These programs are being used in school systems in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Its "Skills for Adolescence Program," for students in grades six through eight, and a new "Skills for Growing" program for elementary school students are sponsored with the Lions Clubs International and supported by AASA and a number of other major educational and professional organizations. ***Recent Activity:*** published with AASA *Positive Prevention*, a 12-page booklet on successful approaches to preventing drug and alcohol abuse by students.

70001 Training and Employment Institute, West Wing, Suite 300, 600 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, DC 20024; 202/484-0103.

Has worked successfully for two decades to motivate students to stay in school, and dropouts to return to school. ***Recent activity:*** A $133,000 first-year grant awarded in 1988 from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Aetna Life and Casualty Foundation, and the General Electric Foundation will assist in developing a program combining dropout prevention, workforce literacy, and the creation of an extensive stay-in-school curriculum. The curriculum will include remedial education, employment readiness, career awareness, and personal skills development. Field testing of the curriculum will involve 10 sites nationwide in 1989.

Section C

Tackling the At-Risk Problem



In the following pages, find out how schools identify students at risk and what they do to help them. Many programs and strategies are explored . . . some that are part of a holistic approach to addressing the problem, some that seek to solve a particular school issue, and some that deal with unique problems of students at risk. The more successful efforts are comprehensive, designed to meet a variety of specific needs. And their effectiveness depends on cooperation among the many sectors of the school and community.

Identifying Students At Risk

"First find'em, then help'em," one school administrator remarked casually during a conversation on how to bring students out of at-risk conditions.

But, as the numerous responses for the AASA survey made for this report confirm, "finding 'em" is no easy task. In the process, school systems rely on a variety of philosophies, definitions, mechanisms, tools, forms, scales, computer programs, staff members, and staff actions.

The efforts and concepts for identifying at-risk students go back decades. In 1955, for example, J. Ough and R. DeHaan published a seminal work titled, Identifying Children Who Need Help (Science Research Associates, Chicago). The good news is that the modern computer-based identification process in use today is a far cry from the all-but-primordial model of 1955.

Start with a definition

In identifying at-risk students and potential dropouts, it is prudent to start with a definition, especially if one is set by state law, as in the case in Wisconsin. That state's definition is this:

> "Children at Risk" means dropouts, pupils who have been absent from school without acceptable excuses (under state code provisions), pupils who are parents and pupils who have been adjudicated delinquents, who are one or more years behind their age group on the number of credits attained or in basic skill levels.

The state law is simply a take-off point for a local district to draft its own definition. Many Wisconsin school systems have adopted the following statement:

> At-risk children are potential noncompleters who — because of social, health, or educational factors — are experiencing difficulty with learning, school achievement, progress toward graduation, or preparation for employment, as evidenced by pupils who 1) have been absent from school without acceptable excuses, 2) are parents, 3) have been an adjudicated delinquent, and 4) are one or more years behind their age group in the number of credits attained or basic skill levels.

Getting beyond definitions

In reality, there can be no single, working definition of an at-risk student because the definition must vary from community to community, from school to school and, very possibly, from year to year. The basis of a definition, as well as the basis of a district's program for identifying students at risk, then becomes a list of the characteristics of the potential dropout.

Districts use short lists and long lists. And they use the lists in their efforts to aid teachers and other staff members in developing their understanding of and ability to identify at-risk students. Teacher awareness and identification skills are honed through inservice education sessions, at faculty meetings, through internal newsletters, and through reports from dropout prevention coordinators.

Here, for the record, is a composite of the characteristics and approaches used by many districts across the nation to identify their at-risk students.

Check early warning signals

District officials first ask teachers and other staff members to become aware of the early danger signals having to do with *school and the student's educational progress.* These include:

- Absenteeism/truancy/frequent tardiness
- Poor grades
- Discrepancy between ability and performance
- Reading level not commensurate with grade level
- Difficulty learning math skills
- Verbal deficiency
- Inability to tolerate structured activities
- Lack of basic skills
- Lack of definitive educational goals
- Feeling of alienation from school
- Belief that school doesn't care
- Failure to see the relevance of education to life experience
- Limited extracurricular involvement
- Two or more years older than peers
- Frequent change of school
- Retention in one or more grades
- Disruptive classroom behavior.

Next, teachers and staff are asked to be alert to factors having to do with the ***student's family background.*** These include:

- Single parent home
- Low-income family
- Poor communication between home and school
- Siblings or parents who are dropouts
- Low educational level of parents
- Excessively stressful home environment
- Limited parent monitoring of student's activities
- Low parental expectations
- Dysfunctional family
- Few study aids in the home
- Parents are migrant workers.

Third, teachers and staff are asked to be alert to factors having to do with the ***student's personal life and behavior.***

- Inability to identify with peer group
- Friends not in school
- Poor social adjustment
- Difficulty relating to authority figures
- Disruptive behavior and rebellious attitude toward authority
- Frequent health problems
- Has experienced some form of emotional trauma
- Poor self-concept
- Works more hours per week than most students
- Has responsibility of raising one or more children
- Is lured by immediate gratifications outside of school (job, wages, experiences)
- Uses drugs, alcohol
- Is delinquent
- Has attempted suicide
- Above average or below average intelligence
- Early assumption of adult roles.

Examine elementary vs. secondary differences

Another look at the potential dropout is provided by isolating the characteristics of the elementary student at possible risk from those of the secondary student at risk. Palm Beach County, Florida, for example, sees these separate sets of characteristics:

Criteria for identifying elementary students

- Failure to meet promotion requirements — for example, a record of previous retentions
- Failure to meet certification requirements on SSAT
- Failure to meet curriculum objectives established for elementary students
- Attitudinal or attendance problems
- Serious home or personal problems which have a negative effect on the learning process
- Lack of interest in schoolwork
- Developmental age below expectancy level on Gesell screening instrument
- Failure to complete skills on kindergarten checklist
- Behavior problems that interfere with learning
- Academic progress below grade level

Criteria for identifying secondary students

- Record of academic credit deficiencies
- Retention one or more times in past
- Failure to meet certification requirements on SAT I or II
- Scores in stanines 1, 2, 3, 4 on the SAT in total reading or math
- Lack of motivation or interest to a degree that affects academic achievement
- Documented history of substance abuse
- Documented history of consistent, disruptive behavior which interferes with the student's learning, the educational process of other students, or warrants suspension or expulsion
- Recommendation for alternative education by the court system, the State Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, or staff committee.
- Placement in a sheltered home under the protective custody of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.
- Pregnancy or school-age parenthood.

How districts do it

Here are glimpses of four models of district procedures for identifying students at risk.

Model A:

The board of education conducts periodic surveys in all its elementary, middle, and high schools to establish local profiles of dropouts and potential dropouts. The survey questionnaires for each level differ slightly, but all seek facts about the student's school work, family and home background, and the individual's attitudes and habits.

Each questionnaire includes as many as 80 questions. The board asks about student absences, tardies, suspensions, behaviors ("Often cries?"), ("Unusually quiet?"), social skills ("Aggressive?"), health, scores on achievement tests, reading levels, participation in class, and related items.

In addition, the survey instruments provide space for student comments ("Why do you plan to leave school?") and comments by parents ("What can the school do now to help your child stay in, or return, to school?").

The data are analyzed by the school system's central statistical service and distributed to school principals. The central office instructs principals to track and report 1) the names of middle and high school students who have maintained less than a 2.0 cumulative grade-point average; and 2) those students who have 15 days or more of absences in the last 12 months. These two crucial pieces of information serve to alert several of the school system's departments, including supervisors of research and evaluation, student services, and the curriculum department.

Model B:

To identify its high risk students, the school board contracts with a private consulting firm to compile characteristics of dropouts and to develop a dropout profile. The consultants study the dropouts of the graduating class. From the data, the consultants construct "prediction models" for identifying potential dropouts as early as the sixth grade.

In addition to a general dropout profile, the consultants provide the school board with profiles of potential dropouts among white males, white females, minority males, and minority females. The model for screening students contains a built-in scoring mechanism. Students who score below a certain level are identified as high risk for dropping out. Their names go to a dropout prevention committee, with the recommendation that the students be admitted to special programs. The final action is taken by the committe, which includes a principal, guidance counselor, and teacher.

Among factors the committee takes into special consideration are:

- Math and reading grade-point averages
- Remedial instruction received prior to identification as high risk
- Absences
- Number of years retained.

Model C:

Using research studies as a base, public school officials compile a profile to identify potential school dropouts. This profile is computerized and printouts sent to all secondary school principals in the district. Principals are instructed to use the profile as a "probability indicator" and as an identification/counseling tool. The principals provide the profile information to counselors, assistant principals, occupation specialists, and teachers, who identify at-risk students by name.

Staff members are directed to identify without fail students whose characteristics match two or more of the items on the profile, including the following:

- Eighteen or more absences in one school year (Fridays and Mondays count as two absences each).
- Two or more years older than the average age of the grade level
- Reading stanine less than 4
- Three or more schools attended

- Three or more Ds or Fs in the most recent grading period.

Model D:

Prior to the fall school opening, this district's At-Risk Committee reviews the previous year's school records to determine students who:

- Are adjudicated delinquents
- Are parents
- Have been absent from school without acceptable excuses
- Are dropouts
- Are one or more years behind their age group in basic skill levels
- Are one or more years behind their age group in the number of credits attained.

Once the student has been identified as at risk, the parent and the student are notified of the student's eligibility to be in the at-risk program. Upon the request of the parent or student, the at-risk coordinator will convene a meeting of the At-Risk Committee members to assess the student's needs and to formulate an intervention plan. Both in-school and community resources that can help the student overcome the barriers to learning are identified and a specific plan of action is adopted. ***Note:*** Any student or his or her parents may request the at-risk coordinator for an at-risk assessment at any time.

The Frederick County, Maryland, schools use one word that serves well to keep the definition of students at risk simple and flexible. That word is "incompatiblity." One administrator explains: "Incompatibility between school and student is the inability of the student to adjust to the school and the school's inability to serve the student."

Scenario for Identification

If you and your colleagues are developing plans for identification of at-risk students, the following scenario may be useful. It is a composite of steps taken by dropout prevention coordinators in several states as they worked toward procedures for identifying students at risk.

- Form a committee to develop an instrument for identifying dropouts.
- From lists of characteristics of dropouts and of potential dropouts, select items that suit your local situation.
- Distribute first draft instruments among key people and groups for comments and suggestions.
- After approval (by staff members and district officials), distribute the form to all schools and teachers.
- Conduct staff development sessions in the use of the identification form.
- Announce who in each school (principal, counselor, dropout prevention coordinator, faculty member) will be responsible for coordinating the use of the instrument on a schoolwide basis.
- Develop method for reporting to teachers, principals, and other staff members the number of students identified as potentially at risk, and the subsequent actions taken.
- Review identification instrument periodically and revise as necessary.

At-Risk Student Profile

Student's Name: ____________________________

Age: ________ Grade: ________ Date: ________

Reason Student Is at Risk
(check as appropriate):

1. ______ Adjudicated delinquent
2. ______ Teen parent
3. ______ Absent from school without acceptable excuses
4. ______ Dropout

AND one or both of the following:

1. ______ Behind in credits (check as appropriate)

Should be at ____ credits

Has attained ____ credits

End of year credits ____

Lacks the following requirements: ____________

____

____

2. ______ Behind in basic skills (check as appropriate)

____ Reading

Should be at level ____

Test level ____

Name of test ____________________

Date administered ____________________

____ Math

Should be at level ____

Test level ____

Name of test ____________________

Date administered ____________________

Indicators (check if the descriptive term applies to student):

____ Non-involvement in school/community activities

____ Non-goal directed

____ Abused physically, emotionally, sexually

____ Poor self-image

____ Low intellectual functioning

____ Absenteeism (10 days per semester)

____ Discipline problems

____ Drug/alcohol history

____ Transfer student

____ Poor peer relations

____ Withdrawn

____ Child living with family trauma

____ Ethnic, economic, culturally disadvantaged

____ Low motivation

____ Severe depression

____ Other (list) ____________________

____

Note: Although the computer is increasingly used to provide profile information in a growing number of schools, paper and pencil profiles still make an inexpensive and useful device for identifying students at risk. The above form is widely used in a number of Midwestern school districts.

Holistic Approaches

Since there is no one definition of "at risk," there is no one solution. The schools that have been most successful are generally those that attack the problem on a holistic basis. They see it as a problem that begins before the child enters kindergarten and then increasingly manifests itself as the child advances (or fails to advance) through school. Therefore, successful strategies attack the problem at many levels.

Six 'best bet' strategies

The U.S. Department of Education, with a group of school superintendents, recently issued a report outlining the six "best bet" strategies for "keeping these youngsters in school and for helping them to achieve while they are there."

1. **Intervene early.** Signs that a child is at risk of having academic difficulties can appear even before he or she starts kindergarten. Therefore, educators must monitor the academic and social progress of children carefully and early — and provide special help before years of academic failure have eroded a youngster's self-esteem and left him or her woefully behind in school. Helping children develop competence and confidence in their ability to learn is a good way to instill a desire to learn and to prepare for a lifetime of learning.
2. **Create a positive school climate.** Evidence strongly suggests that this is perhaps the best way educators can encourage students to stay enrolled and to learn. Good schools possess strong leaders who stress academic achievement, maintain an orderly and disciplined environment, and work with staff to instill positive values and self-confidence in students.
3. **Set high expectations.** Research consistently shows that educators who expect students to maintain high standards for attendance, academics, and behavior get more in return. However, expectations must be realistic, and at-risk students must receive the support they need to meet them.
4. **Select and develop strong teachers.** Teachers exert tremendous influence in students' education and attitudes toward school. Therefore, a concerted effort must continually be made to select and train good teachers who are sensitive to the needs of at-risk students.
5. **Provide a broad range of instructional programs to accommodate students with diverse needs.** A pregnant 12-year-old and a habitually truant 16-year-old require different forms of assistance and cannot always be expected to benefit from the same program.
6. **Initiate collaborative efforts to develop and administer dropout prevention programs.** Schools, communities, churches, and families all influence what and how much students learn as well as whether or not they attend school. Hence, jointly planned and administered programs are often needed.

"The dropout problem must be addressed cooperatively by the schools, parents, policy makers, social agencies, and the corporate community," summarizes Leonard Britton, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, in the U.S. Education Department's report. "Together, we can design and implement programs, determine their effectiveness, and aggressively support the strategies that really work."

This chapter presents eight brief case studies that exemplify, in whole or in part, the way school districts across the country are creating and implementing a multi-dimensional approach to addressing the needs of at-risk student populations.

Comprehensiveness Is Critical To Success

Palm Beach County, Florida
(Enrollment: 90, 384; K-12)

"Our efforts in dropout prevention begin in grade one and extend through all grade levels and even beyond, with retrieval activities for those who have left the system."

Thomas J. Mills, Superintendent

It has taken a bit of learning — end experience — for the Palm Beach County schools to master ways for decreasing student alienation and disinterest and, consequently, to reduce its dropout rates. The initial learning experience for the district took place between 1980 and 1983, when the school board was one of seven participants in the National School Enhancement Research Project, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice.

Special Advertising Campaign

The school board has held discussions with McDonald and four other Florida boards of education to develop a retrieval effort through advertising on tray liners. This advertising would alert dropouts to sources of help to reconnect with school or training programs.

A simpler and effective way for linking ex-students to appropriate programs are spot announcements the district uses on local radio, publicizing the Dropout Prevention Center. These bring new contacts with ex-students who have an interest to return to school and their parents.

Some 375 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were involved in that research activitiy in Palm Beach County. School administrators applied — and tested — half a dozen strategies to deter alienation and disinterest. These included changed classroom instructional methods, student involvement activities, student training in social skills, parent involvement, career awareness programs, and the management of change in schools.

Many of these strategies — used first in a limited way — have been carried over and continued in the expanded dropout prevention program now in effect in the district. Underpinning today's program, however, are not research dollars from the outside but a commitment from the board of education that has brought about these two basic developments:

- A dropout prevention center.
- A comprehensive dropout prevention plan.

The dropout center was established in 1986 with the support of International Business Machines (IBM) and Florida Atlantic University. It is under the direction of a dropout prevention coordinator, who is also responsible for guiding the dropout prevention plan.

The plan has been published in a 109-page document which contains descriptions of the school system's educational alternatives, efforts on behalf of teenage parents, youth services,and programs for prevention of substance abuse and disciplinary problems.

"Our efforts in dropout prevention begin in grade one and extend through all the grade levels and even beyond, with retrieval activities for those who have left the system," says Superintendent Thomas J. Mills. Indeed, 50 Palm Beach elementary schools have access to alternatives for students identified as potential dropouts. Similarly, all secondary schools offer alternative services for students who are identified as potential dropouts.

In its overall attack on dropouts, the Palm Beach County school board begins at the beginning. It first wants to know who drops out, why, and where the dropouts go after they leave school prematurely. This is where the district's dropout tracking system goes into operation, and where IBM's executive-on-loan plan is useful. But Florida Atlantic University and the school board contribute critical information and help to the tracking system. The three partners have developed statistical profiles of dropouts and are trying out different ways for tracing the school leavers, finding out the reasons for their leaving and what kind of educational programs can bring them back or should have been used to keep them from dropping out.

A dozen-plus educational alternatives

What kind of programs will hold the students at risk in school and prevent dropouts? This is the major question facing school officials as they pour time, effort, ingenuity, and resources (space, materials, special staff) into exploring answers and testing solutions.

The answer for Palm Beach lies primarily in educational alternatives. Here we have the major concentraiton of the district's services on behalf of the student at risk. Alternatives are made available for kindergarten through grade 12 students, including gifted minority students who are at risk of leaving school early when their educational needs are not met; marginal learners; those having language deficiencies; and those whose main goal is a job.

The chief mechanism for selecting and referring students to alternative programs is the district's child study team. The primary medium of the program is the self-contained classroom, and the chief method is individualized instruction. Teacher aides, working with experienced teachers, are indispensable in the process, which uses a wide variety of materials to give students options for learning. In most instances, these materials include computers, manipulative items, individualized kits, teacher-made materials, and audiovisual equipment.

One underlying goal dominates nearly all Palm Beach alternative programs: It is to provide activities that will help students develop positive attitudes about themselves, their school, and working with others.

Palm Beach County schools operate more than a dozen educational alternative programs, with a variety of goals and offerings so wide they serve elementary and secondary students at risk from every school building in the distict. The structure and design of these programs are set forth in official district statements so that board members, parents, teachers, administrators, and students will know the objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes of each. Here, for illustration, is the essential information about one alternative that focuses on vocational education.

One alternative: A second chance for success

An announced goal of this program is to give selected students a "second chance, an opportunity to experience success" through full-time enrollment in a technical education center. Academic and vocational instruction are offered side by side. Central to the course offering, however, is the preparation of students to function successfully in the work world.

No more than 90 students — 25 from the junior high level and 65 from the high school level — are admitted to this program. Classes are limited to 15 students each. Each class is directed by a certified teacher assisted by a teacher aide.

To be admitted to the program, students must:

- Be two or more years over age for the grade in which they are enrolled at the time of application.
- Express an interest in improving their mathematics, English, and reading skills.
- Show a strong desire to participate in employability-skills training.
- Meet the criteria for at-riskness.

As in all alternative education, parental consent is required for acceptance; and parents themselves must agree to become active partners in the training of their children. This is no *pro forma* matter. A parent advisory board is a standing mechanism for the vocational education curriculum. Parents are continually kept informed, by phone calls and newsletters, of their children's attendance and progress. Workshops by district specialists aid parents in promoting the education of their children. Volunteers from the parent advisory board tutor students in the classrooms and work with them to improve work habits and develop their employability skills. Progress charts, kept for each student, are reviewed monthly with parents and students.

What does the district expect from this vocational education alternative? In words approved by the board of education, it expects the dropout rate to decrease by 50 percent among students who remain in the program until they have reached their goals — there is no official time limit on length of enrollment. And it expects that "50 percent of the participants will show significant improvement in grade-point average, attendance, and attitude toward self and school. There also should be a 50 percent decrease in number of referrals for discipline reasons."

Parents: partners, advocates, guest speakers

Much of what the Palm Beach school system does to prevent dropouts is touched by the work of parents. Some 1,700 volunteers throughout the county tutor students who have academic difficulty, whether in primary grades or secondary school. Officials believe that these "one-to-one contacts not only help students improve grades but also raise student self-esteem."

Parental help takes different forms. At one high school, "parents as pals" become partners to students who need support and help to continue their education. In other schools, parents act as advocates for students, seeing to it that student problems are recognized by teachers and principals. And in still other schools, parents operate truancy hotlines designed to call homes of students who are truant or tardy and to alert parents or the school when a student is seen away from school during school hours.

Parents also form a reservoir of guest speakers for all grade levels. Hundreds of parents appear before student groups to talk about jobs — and the study skills, work habits, and attitudes needed for success. "All our alternative education programs have become more relevant to students as a result of what they have heard parents and volunteers say," said a Palm Beach school official.

Inservice for alternative educators

Because teachers and teacher aides conducting alternative education programs have problems unique to their work, Palm Beach offers workshops for alternative educators throughout the year. During 1986 and 1987, for example, the district offered a series of four-hour workshops on teaching to different learning styles, designing incentives for student success, teaching problem solving, and using the newspaper in instruction — as all of these topics relate to teaching students at risk.

"The workshops offer the additional opportunity of soliciting ideas from teachers on how to prevent dropouts and provide better service for students at risk," explained one district administrator.

Effective Schools Research Should Serve As a Base

Anacortes, Washington (Enrollment: 2,000; K-12)

"We have learned a great deal about the conditions which will hold students in schools — and bring them back if they have left. . ."

C. Duane Lowell
Superintendent

It's an intervention program. It's an alternative school. It's an effective schools model. It's a day program, an evening program, a summer program. It's a dropout prevention effort. It's all these and more, and it functions as the Learning Opportunities Center at Anacortes School District No. 103 in the state of Washington.

Just as the Learning Opportunities Center embodies a number of concepts, so is it the result of action by leaders from a number of agencies.

First, there is the school board of Anacortes School District. The district officials have long been concerned with the high loss of students between grades 8 and 12 (the average attrition rate was 26 percent). They explored the problem with community colleges, county and state vocational educators, business leaders, and other school boards in the county.

The board adopted a number of measures to combat dropouts — expansion of the middle school counseling staff was one. But the main aim was to find an intervention program that would redirect students toward a high school diploma or a GED.

Eventually the search led to the Comprehensive Competency Program (CCP) of the Remediation and Training Institute, based in Washington, D.C. This model was developed in 1983 with Ford Foundation funds and has been adopted by nearly 80 centers across the United States. The Anacortes school district became one of two centers in Washington state to qualify for use of the Comprehensive Competency Program.

A number of CCP features are worth noting. Primarily for students in grades 8 through 12, CCP is also suited for adults seeking a high school education. It:

- Operates on an open-entry, open-exit basis.
- Covers academic competencies ranging from elementary reading and math through high-school and first-year college science, math, humanities, social studies, and writing.
- Includes "functional competencies" covering occupational knowledge, consumer economics, and health information.

The theoretical basis for the CCP are Benjamin Bloom's mastery of learning theories and the research by "effective schools" proponents. This means that the CCP curriculum stresses time-on-task, close monitoring of student progress, frequent testing, and frequent reinforcing of student success. Subject matter is divided into three difficulty levels — basic, intermediate, and advanced for each subject area. At each level, content is divided into lessons that can be mastered in a single learning period — called "bite-sized" lessons in the CCP.

Meeting a variety of needs

The Comprehensive Competencies Program suited the needs of Anacortes. It became the basis for the Learning Opportunities Center, which served 114 students during 1985-86. To meet the variety of student needs, the Center operated programs during the day, during the evening, and in the summer. An evaluation of Center achievements showed a retention rate of 79 percent but, when the evening program is excluded from the calculations, the retention rate was, in the words of Anacortes officials, "an amazing 93 percent."

Versatile is the word for the Learning Opportunities Center. Its day program was designed primarily for dropouts of the Anacortes High School. Day program students used the CCP to the utmost, receiving large doses of language skills, math, social studies, and science; as well as occupational knowledge, consumer economics, and health information. Of the 33 students enrolled in the day program during 1985-86, some 85 percent completed the requirements for a high school diploma.

The Center also operated a "catch-up" program for high school students lagging in diploma requirements. In 1985-86, the catch-up program provided an opportunity for 19 students to enroll. Anacortes school officials were especially pleased that 18 of them completed their objectives and met graduation requirements "in a timely manner to graduate with their friends and classmates."

On the whole, the evening and summer school programs were less productive than the daytime program, and are now being re-evaluated by the district.

What Works with Alternative School Kids?

While operating the Anacortes Learning Opportunities Center, its directors asked a basic question: What conditions best promoted the learning and teaching of these students who had lost interest in the traditional school and were having a second chance in an alterantive setting?

Researchers at Anacortes conducted intensive studies on this question and came up with these observations:

- **Students tended to have a learning style that was most productive when assignments were given in short, uncomplicated segments; when frequent supervision was provided by the teacher; and when peer relationships with able students were encouraged.**
- **Students desired to be placed with or near an appropriate supervisor or teacher, and to meet with them regularly. Students wanted frequent supervision and checking of assignments.**
- **Students sought a variety of learning situations — for example, working alone, with other students, with teachers, with other adults, and with multimedia and computers.**
- **Students tended also to seek variety in learning media — tapes, videotapes, lectures, discussions, records, radio, stereo, and television. They welcomed precise oral instructions and explanations when given an assignment.**
- **Students reponded to frequent praise, liked to know about communications sent home if they were positive, and especially appreciated praise in front of parents.**
- **Students concentrated best when they were provided indirect or subdued light away from windows, and when dividers of plants were used to block or diffuse illumination.**
- **Students liked classroom settings that were informal and equipped with a variety of chairs, lounge furniture, and carpeting. They liked to study or work on the floor or on stairsteps.**
- **Students tended to desire frequent breaks and assignments that required movement to different locations. They liked schedules that required productivity and kept them moving.**

Note: **For details about the Comprehensive Competency Program, write Remediation and Training Institute, 1521 Sixteenth St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036. For information on the Anacortes Learning Opportunities Center, Contact C. Duane Lowell, Superintendent, Anacortes Public Schools, 2200 M Ave., Anacortes, WA 98221. Telephone: (206) 293-1200.**

Staff Development Is a Must

TULSA, OKLAHOMA
(Enrollment: 45,268, K-2)

> *"Ten components, which address everything from student self-concept to tardiness to enlisting parent help, permeat our schools. . . ."*
>
> Orlando Hazley,
> Dropout Prevention Coordinator

Staff development is the alpha of Tulsa's dropout prevention program. And according to Tulsa's coordinator of dropout prevention, staff development means workshops for teachers in schools with large numbers of students potentially at risk of dropping out.

The workshops make use of audiovisuals, resource people from the school system and community, and a rich variety of prepared materials. With these resources, the dropout prevention coordinator and assistants seek to accomplish three main goals.

Goal 1:
To help teachers and staff become aware of student characteristics that relate to dropping out.

According to research, 16 major symptoms of early school-leaving manifest themselves as early as elementary school. These symptoms become more pronounced as the student grows older because the behavior pattern that leads the student toward dropping out becomes more firmly fixed each year, "making it difficult for an intervention process to reverse a sometimes accelerating trend."

In the workshops, Tulsa teachers are alerted to these 16 characteristics (the items most highly predictive are given first):

- **Age.** Student is two or more years older than his or her classmates.
- **Grade level.** Student is one or more years behind in grade level.
- **Academic aptitude.** Student has an I.Q. of 90 or below.
- **Grades.** Student has made D's or F's in two or more subjects in the current or previous year.
- **Interest in school work.** Student shows little interest in school work. Examples: does not do homework, says he or she does not like school, does not respond in class.
- **Ability to read.** Student is two or more years below reading level.
- **Parental attitude toward graduation** — Parent(s) do not care whether student finishes school.
- **General adjustment to school.** Student has a negative feeling toward school — indicates he or she has few or no friends, believes teachers are not fair.
- **Participation in out-of-school activities.** Student does not belong to out-of-school organizations such as the Boy Scouts, 4-H, church groups.
- **School attendance.** Student has record of chronic absenteeism — is absent 20 or more days per year from school.
- **Acceptance by other students.** Student perceives that he or she is not liked by other students; has no personal friends.
- **Family size.** Student has five or more siblings.
- **Mother's educational level.** Mother dropped out of school at grade 8 or earlier.
- **Father's educational level.** Father dropped out of school at Grade 8 or earlier.
- **Health.** Student is often absent due to ill health or tires easily in school.

Tulsa teachers and staff are encouraged to use the Dropout Alert Scale (DAS) to find out if students possess the above characteristics, although some of the symptoms can be observed in the classroom and others may be ascertained through the student's cumulative file.

Goal 2:
To encourage teachers and staff to conduct group counseling sessions with potential dropouts.

In proposing this plan, Tulsa officials stress that candidates for the group counseling sessions should be "students who are salvageable and not past the point where nothing would influence them to remain in school." Further, the student groups should include those with similar problems and concerns. Specialists also suggest that students who may be disrupting factors in small group situations may be excluded.

Teachers attending the staff development workshops are given the following additional specifications for group counseling with potential dropouts:

- Student groups should be on a voluntary basis.

- Membership should be kept to between 6 and 10 students.
- A counselor or other qualified staff member should be in charge.
- The groups should meet once or twice a week for no less than a semester.
- The purpose must always be to provide an opportunity for potential dropouts to express their feelings, attitudes, and hostilities — free from adult judgments, restrictions, and advice. The assumption here is that, in such an accepting atmosphere, students will gain insights into problems which, if instrumental to leaving school, could be alleviated.
- All adult threats should be removed from the sessions.
- Peer pressures that go along with peer relationships should be allowed to continue.
- The only discipline to be administered should be that of expulsion of disruptive members from the group.
- If, after 8 or 10 sessions, the right atmosphere and relationships are not established with the group, the counseling sessions should be discontinued.

Goal 3:

To encourage teachers and staff to initiate dropout prevention efforts in schools with heavy concentrations on potential dropouts.

To reach this goal, Tulsa's coordinator of dropout prevention recommends a program of 10 components. These should be under continuous evaluation and be subject to change and extension.

Component 1: Reduce course load of the low achievers and provide learning materials at the appropriate reading level. Most schools "push" low achievers out of school simply because these students cannot keep up with the rest of the class.

Component 2: Extend the time for the potential dropout to finish high school. Giving this type of student five years to finish high school is not inappropriate. Encourage the student to attend summer school to complete high school credits.

Component 3: Install a program to improve the self-concept of potential dropouts. (Dr. John Dewell, coordinator of staff development for Tulsa Public Schools, has provided such a program.) This type of program should involve all teachers, homeroom and classroom, in supportive, self-concept/self-esteem development activities.

Component 4: Assign peer counselors. Many potential dropouts need friends in a new peer group. Potential dropouts need to improve their emotional and interpersonal relations, and peer counselors can help.

Component 5: Implement a program of career awareness, career orientation, career counseling, and pre-employment skill training.

Consider a Longer School Year

AASA advocates a longer school year of approximately 200 days, as well as further studies on the effects of a lengthened school year on students and student learning. Flexibility in length of school day and school year could greatly benefit the student at risk. Not only could this help provide "catch-up" time for students falling behind, it could also expand the opportunities for individualized instruction and alternative curriculum. Providing such time and such alternatives may be the only way to retain some students at risk.

Component 6: Set up a plan to accommodate potential dropouts who are traditionally late for school. Some late arrivers have afternoon and night jobs that cause them to sleep late in the mornings. A schedule to allow them to come to school at 10 a.m. and stay later than the usual closing time should be considered. Some teachers may volunteer to stay after school to participate in this phase of the program, or a special staff member might be hired to teach and counsel these students after school hours. The potential dropout is unlikely to give up a job in order to arrive at school on time.

Component 7: Implement a schedule of home visitation to the potential dropout. A cooperative effort between school and home is necessary to keep students in school. Parents need to know first-hand that the school is interested in their child and in keeping him or her in school.

Component 8: Implement a systematic program of telephoning all absentees. This lets the student and parents know that the school is interested in the well-being of the student. This plan should cover the potential dropouts and all other students.

Component 9: In conjunction with home visitations and telephoning, the student government should create a committee whose responsibility is to telephone or visit personally with potential dropouts. The committee could be composed of friends of the potential dropouts. Peer pressure can be a positive force as well as a negative force.

Component 10: These teachers should help with those students who have attendance problems. Such teachers should talk with students and parents about the advantages of being in school.

For information: Orlando Hazley, Coordinator, Dropout Prevention, Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa, OK 74147-0208.

Focus Must Be on Prevention

Binghamton, New York (Enrollment: 6,055; K-8)

"The guiding principal is one of prevention now rather than treatment later. . . ."

—Frank J. Cleary,
Superintendent

At the heart of Binghamton, New York's efforts to stem the tide of dropouts is a series of programs strategically placed between infancy and grade 8. The district's bet is that early and comprehensive intervention programs will help youngsters stay in school and succeed.

The intervention programs include:

Parents and Children Together (or PACT). A parent education program that focuses on parenting skills needed with infants and toddlers. It is open to all parents with children to age three. Central activities for parent and child include visits with parent educators, group meetings, workshops, a lending library of books and toys, and referral information for medical and health problems.

Binghamton School Partnership Project. Aimed at developing strong school ties for parents of youngsters in pre-K through grade 3. A basic goal is to promote the belief that all children can learn through encouragement and positive reinforcement. Another is to prevent school difficulties at the earliest possible level. This is a joint program conducted by the State University of New York at Binghamton and the Binghamton City School District.

Effective Parenting Information for Children (or EPIC). A districtwide program that helps parents of children in pre-K through grade 5 develop their parenting skills. Includes activities for both parents and children to help them develop their communication skills. There are workshops for parents, teachers, and support staff in how to help students develop self-esteem; and there are referral services. The district is planning a follow-up program for adolescents in grades 6 through 8.

There is near unanimity among researchers on this point: Whether a high school student will graduate can be predicted from data in the third grade based on four factors: 1) the student's achievement record, 2) socioeconomic status, 3) family characteristics, 4) nonpromotion.

Use What You Have in Place

Brown Deer, Wisconsin (Enrollment: 1,800; K-12)

Proliferation of new programs is not always the answer. Much of what districts have in place can be effective if schools direct these resources toward all disaffected students.

The plan of service for at-risk students in the Brown Deer, Wisconsin, school district illustrates the principle that districts often can use what they already have. And what a district itself may not have in place may be available from a nearby district.

Brown Deer school administrators are seeing to it that the following existing programs are used "to the utmost" for at-risk students:

- A wide **variety of vocational courses** to meet many interest levels. At-risk students are assured that credits for these classes are counted toward graduation.
- **Work experience** in grades 11 and 12. Again, students at risk are given one credit per semester toward graduation.
- **Self-pacing classes** in grades 7 and 8. Faculty and staff are encouraged to bring into these classes all students showing academic deficiencies.

- High school **remedial classes** in English, science, social studies, and mathematics. These courses fulfill graduation requirements.
- **Tutorial programs** for students experiencing difficulty in any of the high school courses. This is a student-tutor-student project that has proved useful for several years.

Brown Deer administrators are accepting for credit at the high school level correspondence courses, night school courses at Milwaukee Area Technical College, courses in Milwaukee alternative high schools, and summer school courses offered by the Milwaukee public schools.

The district has also intensified its efforts and is making greater use of its long-standing plans for involving parents in dealing with at-risk students:

- Parent conferences are held three times a year for students in grades K through 8, and two times annually for students in grades 9 through 12. Additional meetings are held any time at the request of a student, teacher, or parent.
- When students perform below expectation levels, their parents are notified.
- The assistant principal meets with the parents of children who have received two suspension notices.
- Parents are also notified when students cut class or accumulate four detention marks.

Mix the New with the Tried and True

School District 4J
Eugene, Oregon
(Enrollment: 17,500; K-12)

Asked what they were doing for students at risk, administrators in School District 4J in Eugene, Oregon, came up with a list of more than 40 separate programs underway. Many of these programs represent ideas that have been around for years — such tried-and-true standbys as after-school and peer tutoring, night classes, an alternative high school, and cooperative work-study programs.

Other programs are less common among districts similar in size. Some examples:

- The **Mentor/Advocate Program** pairs students at risk in several elementary and middle schools with adult volunteers — counselors, teachers, or other staff members. The adults become "buddy," tutor, and role model for students who otherwise may not have such models in their lives.
- All middle schools have implemented a **"refusal skills" curriculum** in sixth grade. Its goal: how to say *no* to substance abuse, undesirable social behavior, and other potentially negative or harmful pressures and influences.
- Students identified as potential dropouts are granted one term to be **"on leave" from school.** During that term, they are introduced to job and alternative educational opportunities and, with their parents, are expected to attend counseling sessions. If they choose to return to school after the "leave," they do so with no penalty.
- **A home/school instruction program** provides academic continuity for students enrolled in a substance abuse intervention program at a local hospital. The district also eases their return to their home high schools through a phase-back service.
- A computerized **period-by-period attendance system** in each high school is used to inform parents by phone of student absences and tardiness.
- A **parent trainer,** employed by the district, helps parents experiencing difficulty with their children. The trainer works with individuals and small or large groups of parents and students.

For information: Margaret Nichols, Superintendent, Eugene School District 4J, 200 North Monroe St., Eugene, OR 97402. Telephone: 503/687-3481.

Make Sure Programs Are Coordinated

Granville County, North Carolina
(Enrollment: 6,727; K-12)

"Finding the time to carry out effective programs to keep students in school can be difficult in the midst of other demands. Dropout prevention is a special job needing special staff."

—A. Craig Phillips, North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Absolutely Essential: A Winning School Climate

What is climate? According to Jim Sweeney in a special AASA booklet on this topic, "Climate is how people feel about their school. It is a combination of beliefs, values, and attitudes shared by students, teachers, administrators, parents, bus drivers, office personnel, custodians, cafeteria workers, and others who play an important role in the life of the school. When a school has a 'winning climate,' people feel proud, connected, and committed."

Effective schools share a number of characteristics, Sweeney points out in *Tips for Improving School Climate*, but one consistently rises to the top: a winning school climate. He identified 10 factors that seem to make a real difference:

A supportive, stimulating environment. Includes a spruced-up physical environment; spirit; emphasis on positive attitudes; fun and humor; themes and slogans emphasizing growth; creativity; communications and student involvement in decision-making, among others.

Student-centered. The focus must be on, "What's best for the kids?" Includes tuning in to students; promoting active learning — doing, not just listening; planning for variety (bulletin boards, classroom configuration, lectures, lesson plans); a flexible curriculum that allows for multiple student differences; and follow-up studies with students who have gone on to higher grades.

Positive expectations. Expect the best and you're likely to get it.

Feedback. Catch others succeeding; watch your praise to make it pertinent and on-the-spot; chart your feedback; give negative feedback in positive ways;

Rewards. Bring a crowd into the winner's circle.

Closeness to parents and community. The customer is right.

Communication. Keep the lines open and the flow positive.

Achievement. Includes setting and tracking personal goals; putting these goals in writing for individuals and classrooms as a group.

Trust. The glue that holds the school together. To develop, be consistent; guard confidentiality; be fair; forgive and forget; tell the truth; maintain eye contact; and respect others.

Included in the booklet is a step-by-step process for improving school climate, as well as references for further study. "Developing a winning climate in your school takes commitment," says Sweeney, "and the constant attention of a critical mass of parents, students, and staff. Changing the climate — like changing the world — requires a special push from those who possess that unique quality called leadership."

The job often referred to as "dropout prevention coordinator" is relatively new in America's schools. But as efforts to address the problems of at-risk youth have increased and become more comprehensive, the need for someone to coordinate these efforts has also grown. This is true not only in large school systems, but also in smaller, rural ones.

In addition to helping young people directly, "the employment of a dropout prevention coordinator sends a signal to teachers and principals that the district is serious about reducing the dropout rate," noted North Carolina's superintendent of public instruction.

Like most districts in the state, Granville County, North Carolina, relies greatly on the work of a prevention coordinator. District officials agree that the coordinator's post should be "highly visible," located in the central office. It's important, they say, that the coordinator is readily available to teachers, principals, and the community.

The main skills needed for the job are those of organization, facilitation, and communication. These are the essentials because it is the coordinator's responsibility to bring together all those who must work together for dropout prevention.

Specific duties

What does the prevention coordinator do? The Granville County district's official job description for the post indicates that the coordinator:

- Observes, evaluates, initiates, and directs improvement in the district's dropout prevention efforts.
- Provides leadership for the program, and in the planning and implementation of dropout prevention measures.
- Aids and facilitates the work of teachers and principals in all dropout prevention activities.
- Shares information about dropouts with various publics.
- Serves as liaison between the school system and other agencies.
- Carries on counseling and home and classroom visits.
- Enlists speakers for classes.

"From beginning to end, the dropout prevention coordinator is an indispensable person," says a Granville County school official. "The coordinator's functions begin with setting up a data collection system for potential dropouts and end with evaluation of the program. In between are a hundred tasks of planning, budgeting, communicating, and keeping the action moving. . . ."

Suggestions from the Teachers

At a meeting funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers, NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell suggested a number of "holistic" approaches to improving learning for at-risk students:

- **Change our attitudes toward those we say are ineducable.** These students, she said, have been convinced that they can't learn and their self-esteem is a major problem. "We must not judge them because of race, economic background, etc. . . we must believe every child can learn. . . and we must communicate to these children that their background is no excuse not to learn."
- **Better prepare teachers to teach at-risk students.** We must do a better job of recruiting teachers, especially minority teachers; and *all* teachers must be trained to teach a diverse student population, including at-risk youth, she said. Presently, she lamented, there are no teacher programs that prepare teachers for what they will have to deal with. No teacher, she added, will escape teaching at-risk youth in the future.
- **Improve educational research.** We must ensure that it's expanded and is user-friendly so that teachers can apply it to improve the quality of education. K through 12 teachers also should be involved in this research.
- **Improve bilingual education programs.** Wherever you go, the need for bilingual education is there. Total immersion forces students out, she emphasized.
- **Improve class structure.** Class sizes should be decreased to allow for individualized instruction and work at each student's own pace.
- **Eliminate tracking systems.** These only stigmatize young people, especially minority and poor children.
- **Restructure the schools.** "The way that schools are structured today cannot serve the children of the future," she said. She suggested opening up the schools to three and four-year-olds, ending "chopped up" periods, giving up gifted and talented programs and "blurring the lines" to teach all levels of students simultaneously, having site-based management, allowing for flexibility with federal programs, among others.

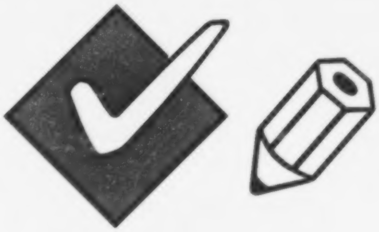
Programs and Strategies that Address Specific School Issues

In this section, we discuss some of the programs that have been successful in providing the support and direction students need so that they are less at risk. Some of these strategies and programs focus on:

- ***Academic achievement***
- ***Customized counseling involving specially selected teachers and occupational specialists***
- ***Student advocate committees***
- ***Increasing study skills***
- ***Providing adult role models.***

By providing programs and strategies addressing issues relevant to at-risk students on a school-wide basis, these schools are taking a stand in preventing and helping their students at risk.

School Issue: Providing Needed Support



A common thread of almost all successful dropout programs is some kind of special support system, team, or alternative program that is charged with identifying students who are at risk, monitoring their academic progress and well-being, and intervening whenever circumstances dictate.

There are a number of examples of programs in this Critical Issues Report that focus on providing students at risk the support they need. Following are glimpses at eight specific efforts.

Academic Achievement May Save the Dropout

Prince George's County, Maryland (Enrollment: 102,146; K-12)

There is something distinctive about Prince George's County's efforts to prevent dropouts and it is this: a conviction that the emphasis with at-risk students must be on academic achievement — that is, on helping the students earn passing, and more than passing, grades in mathematics, English, science, and social studies. It is in this framework that three county high schools (later expanded to five) began in 1985-86 an experiment known — and widely extolled — as Project SUCCESS.

This is not to say that guidance, counseling, development of self-esteem, and supportive services for students are overlooked. They are not, Prince George's County officials say. But the project's major objective is improving student achievement and student gains in their grade-point averages.

Project SUCCESS looks for students who are underachievers or defined as "at risk." The search begins in the eighth grade, with teachers identifying students who are not earning a 2.0 grade-point average and whose standardized test scores are low. Some students who emerge as candidates for the program also have poor attendance records and a history of discipline problems. However, most students are selected simply because they are not working up to their potential and "are in danger of falling through the cracks." Some 760 students in five high schools were enrolled in the 1987 project.

SUCCESS teachers work in teams of four (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) and get together frequently for planning sessions. They offer a variety of teaching methods and styles and use a variety of teaching media. But the emphasis is on mastering basic skills and subject matter. Classes are limited to 20 students. For every 100 SUCCESS students, the high school provides a computer lab. A wide range of enrichment activities and field trips are scheduled for each SUCCESS group. Tutorial assistance is available as needed for all students.

"The program works," says Donald Murphy, project coordinator, "and its success is evident whether you look at the improvement in the grades of SUCCESS students, their records of attendance, or drop in tardiness or suspension incidents."

Concentrate: Don't Scatter Your Shots

Toledo, Ohio
(Enrollment: 43,682; K-12)

A close look at one of Toledo's major dropout prevention efforts, Circle of Support, shows that the principle behind its success is *concentration.* "We decided not to scatter our shots," says Craig Cotner, the official responsible for planning the project. "We concentrated on one high school and focused our efforts on preventing the early leaving of 20 students and on getting 20 students who had already left to return. This concentration, plus the close attention of Circle of Support staff paid off in the first year of operation and is paying off during the second year."

Identification of the 20 potential dropouts was relatively easy. Reaching those who had already left school required a promotional effort in which the two main ingredients were word of mouth ("We want you back if you haven't got your high school diploma. . . .") and a postcard campaign to early-leavers. The approaches worked.

Once enrolled in the Circle of Support, students are served by a team of specially selected teachers and occupational specialists, who are responsible for ensuring that each participating youth receives his or her prescribed social, academic, and job-related services. Serving alongside this team are four Circle of Support leaders, each leader giving concentrated attention to no more than 10 potential dropouts or 10 actual dropouts.

Work with each student begins with the signing of a "contractual agreement" between the student and the Circle of Support leader detailing the school and work responsibilities of all parties. Circle of Support leaders see to it that each student gets the academic work required for graduation and the opportunity for employment, with the jobs provided by the Toledo Area Private Industry Council. During the time students are in the Circle of Support, they are also assured frequent counseling and, where necessary, welfare, health, and parenting assistance.

A Student Advocate Committee Can Come to the Rescue

Grapevine-Colleyville Independent School District, Texas
(Enrollment: 5,565; K-12)

Any student who appears to be having problems in the Grapevine-Colleyville Independent School District in Texas is offered immediate help. The moves on behalf of the troubled student come from a professional team that quickly mobilizes school and community agencies and services to help.

"Our student advocate services," reports E.A. Sigler, Jr., superintendent of schools, "grew out of our responsibliity for creating and maintaining a positive learning environment. We think it is beneficial if we intervene for a student who is out of touch with such an environment."

Team effort

Often, teachers and principals will deal with disruptive behaviors while nurses handle physical complaints and counselors work with the student to solve personal problems. "Yet these school professionals are often unaware that they are all involved with the same child," says William E. Ritter, assistant superintendent. Instead of that fragmentation, an advocate plan provides a teamed effort on behalf of students who are in trouble.

Teachers and other district professionals are supplied with referral sheets for carrying out the plan. Each sheet lists potential symptoms of personal trouble such as inattentiveness, frequent absence, antagonism, temper outbursts, mood changes, excessive weight gain or loss, withdrawal, suicidal tendencies, and evidence of physical injury. A teacher can easily fill in the form and forward it to any of 12 designated staff members.

The staff member receiving the referral convenes a core committee composed of administrators, counselors, the school nurse, a parent (if appropriate), and teachers trained in identifying and assisting students who are at risk. In strict confidence, the referral is evaluated, appropriate resource personnel are alerted, and one member is assigned as an individual advocate for the student who has been referred.

"The task of a student advocate committee," said Ritter, "is to gather information and suggest appropriate help. It has no role at all in determining disciplinary action. Discipline problems, after all, are just one more behavioral concern that should alert professionals that a student may need help."

Its role as a fact-gathering and referral network of support for a student means that the advocate committee may maintain liaison with one or many of 30 or more services, agencies, and consultants within the area. Outside resources include Alanon/Alateen, Narcotics Anonymous, Rainbow Days (for families affected by chemical dependency), a hotline on eating disorders, a parental guidance center, a teen-to-teen hotline on suicide prevention, Tough Love, First Call for Help, and several hospitals with in-patient facilities.

The entire service is described in documents that include a letter to parents; a rationale of the service that offers goals and objectives; a procedural flow chart; and a set of anticipated questions about the service, with answers.

"The system helps school personnel, families and, most important, students," says Superintendent Sigler. "As a school district, we have in place a service through which specific behaviors can be identified and positive responses can be made."

For information: William E. Ritter, Assistant Superintendent, Grapevine-Colleyville Independent School District, 3051 West Highway 26, Grapevine, TX 76051. Telephone: 817/488-9588.

When You Increase Study Skills, You Can Lower School Failures

Liberty, Missouri
(Enrollment: 3,926; K-12)

Faced with a failure rate of almost 15 percent in its senior high school, Liberty Public Schools in Missouri has established a Study Skills Program (SSP) for students whose academic problems are chronic and long-term, as well as for those whose problems are of more recent origin.

School district officials trace the origins of SSP to this conviction: "We know that failure rates drop when teachers voluntarily tutor students after regular school hours. But, after-school tutoring is restricted by the ability and willingness of both students and teachers to work beyond regular hours. That is why the program's designers settled on a flexible, multi-faceted intervention program during the school day." The program includes:

- A tutorial study hall in which students may enroll for instructional units in emotional and academic development, as well as for the assistance they need in mainstream classwork.
- Alternative classes in required subjects in which student failure rates have been highest.

The major goal of the program, according to its designers, is to help students toward personal adjustment and academic success: "We want to stimulate their motivation by helping them succeed."

The program is staffed by a coordinator, alternative class teachers, an aide, and peer tutors. It is also served, but not full-time, by an administrator, counselor, the building principal, and mainstream teachers. The SSP classroom is equipped with a computer and printer, as well as tape recorders, filmstrip projector, and calculators.

Students are referred to the program by parents, counselors, teachers, or administrators; or they may enroll on their own. Placement decisions are shared by the administrator, counselor, and coordinator. Students who have failed one or more classes are divided according to different needs: those with long histories of academic problems, and those whose problems are short-term academic difficulties that appear to require only "hurdle help." Alternate classes are limited to 15 students.

Teachers were involved in planning SSP. A team of administrators and teachers observed similar programs in other school districts. Teachers serving as department heads, together with counselors and administrators, determined the target population and program structure. Inservice on the program for all teachers offered an initial faculty-wide presentation and departmental meetings through the school year.

Said one district official: "We hope that having mainstream teachers involved in the program will encourage them to incorporate into their regular courses those alternative practices that prove successful in the SSP. Eventually, we may be able to phase it out."

The program was initially supported by a grant from the Missouri State Department of Education.

For information: Stephan E. Butler, Assistant Principal, Liberty Public Schools, 14 South Main St., Liberty, MO 64068. Telephone: 816/781-4541.

Adult Role Models Show the Way

Columbus, Ohio
(Enrollment: 67,647; K-12)

Faced with increases in suspensions and expulsions, the possession of weapons in schools, and substance abuse — particularly among adolescent black males — school and community leaders in Columbus, Ohio, launched three separate prevention and correction programs within a year. All three programs are expanding because of initial success.

1. "In 10 elementary schools," reports Will Anderson, special assistant to the superintendent in Columbus Public Schools, "we've implemented a program of black role models. To do so, we contacted neighborhood churches and recruited black male volunteers, most of them retired, to come into the schools regularly to tutor and provide positive contacts for elementary students at risk."

2. Role modeling also was at the heart of the district's first workshop for 300 middle and high school students considered at risk. The students were from 42 different schools.

Behind the workshop lay the activities of some 75 men and women "interested in providing positive activities, led by blacks, to demonstrate their concern for the specific problems facing the young black males," Anderson said. The problem: "We've got young black males who are raised by women, and they have few contacts with adult males until they have a male teacher — perhaps not until fourth or fifth grade."

The workshop presented black male adults in leadership roles to the young — as both youth and adults took up the topics of self-esteem, male sexuality, career awareness, drug abuse, "coping" skills, and sports.

3. Far more extensive in its involvement with community organizations is the Youth Outreach Project, coordinated by a district staff member. It includes as sponsors the United Way, local police department, county mental health board, juvenile courts, and dozens of other community agencies and organizations.

"The overall purpose of the Youth Outreach Project," said a district official, "is to draw on the natural strengths of families and neighborhoods to channel youth into positive activities.

The project depends on neighborhood-based Outreach units, four to six workers in a neighborhood, and a crisis intervention mobile team. These units identify potentially troubled youth and work to redirect antisocial behavior. They also refer youths to appropriate services or agencies for further help.

The first evaluative survey of the Youth Outreach Project found that the workers were in touch with a large number of the young people who needed help and that the project was particularly useful as an intervention for many or most "gang problems."

For information: Will Anderson, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, Columbus Public Schools, 270 East State St., Columbus, OH. Telephone: 614/225-2646.

Adding Family Therapy Can Help Chronic Offenders

Lexington, North Carolina
(Enrollment: 3,085; K-12)

The truancy rate among the first 12 students in the alternative program for middle school students in Lexington, North Carolina, dropped from 367 aggregate days in 1984-85 to 10 in 1985-86. The involvement of those 12 students with local courts, frequent and widespread before the program, fell to one court appearance for one student during the 1985-86 year. All of the students demonstrated at least minimal grade-level mastery of instructional materials. All 12 were promoted to the next grade.

With those accomplishments in place, Richard L. Thompson, then superintendent of the Lexington City Schools, described to AASA colleagues at the 1987 convention the alternative program for selected students in grades 6 through 8. The program, designed for 12 to 15 chronic offenders per year, combines classroom activities with family therapy.

Staffed by a full-time family therapist, a certified special education teacher, and a teacher assistant, the classroom component is patterned after William Glasser's *Schools Without Failure* and William Purkey's *Inviting School Success*. Its goals are to:

- Provide academic and social experiences at which students can succeed
- Fulfill needs of students "to belong"
- Enhance each student's feeling of worth through structured educational activities
- Challenge students at their own levels of achievement.

The students' families are expected to support school attendance and academic efforts, to improve their parental skills and discipline, and to resolve problems within the family — and they are shown how to do so.

Well-defined steps lead students to participation in the program:

- Referral by regular faculty members
- Documentation of evidence that a youngster indeed qualifies for the program
- Initial contact with parents, followed by home visitation for detailed explanation of the program
- Staff consultation on candidates and subsequent selection and admission of students
- Notification of all parents who have been contacted, with alternative referrals for those whose children are not admitted to the program.

Once a youngster is admitted, instruction is individualized daily, primarily through learning contracts. All work is ungraded. In place of grades, formal feedback to students stresses successful performance. Regular classroom meetings, moderated by adults, encourage students to express their thoughts and feelings and to resolve common problems, such as discipline.

> *"We have abandoned our children to the television set, the fast food place, the automobile, the movie theater, and the street. We'd be hard put to find evidence that we value kids."*

Audiovisual presentations and outside speakers — including juvenile court officials, social workers, and counselors — cover such topics as running away, sexual abuse, and early pregnancy, as well as friendships and fun.

Parent guidance, appreciation

"Perhaps remembering their own unhappy school experiences," said Thompson of the parents whose children are in the program," many of them devalue education in the face of their own children's troubles." That is why, he continued, "staff members try to encourage parents to build pride in their children's accomplishments rather than to perpetuate past anger and disappointments." Biweekly letters from the teacher and weekly visits by the therapist communicate appreciation to parents for their efforts in improving the academic and social behaviors of their children.

"It is also important to establish cooperative relationships with resource people in the community to secure services that students need," Thompson said. "Such people include social workers, court counselors, law enforcement officials, church-sponsored relief organizations, civic groups, mental health personnel, and substance abuse counselors."

Thompson attributed much of the success of the program to a "working relationship characterized by mutual respect for the knowledge, talent, and expertise of personnel, plus mutual belief in the effectiveness of alternative education and a commitment to serve these students rather than push them out."

For information: Lexington City Schools, P.O. Box 1068, Lexington, NC 27293-1068. Telephone: 704/249-8176; or Richard L. Thompson, who is new superintendent of the Tupelo Municipal Separate School District, P.O. Box 7005, Tupelo, MS 38802-7005. Telephone: 601/841-8850.

Occupational Courses Energize Students At Risk

Redwood City, California
(Enrollment; 6,712; K-8)

Sequoia High School accommodates a number of potential dropouts who are "energized" by the occupational courses offered them in cooperation with area industries and business companies. Mentors, who are usually employees of these industries, help guide potential dropouts through graduation — often into jobs and post-high school courses.

The emphasis on training for jobs and informing potential dropouts about the world of work are features of the California Peninsular Academies Program as conducted at Sequoia High School (and in a dozen other high schools in California). But what underpins these efforts is the "no-orphan" principle.

How the principle operates is explained by the coordinator of the program at Sequoia High School: "By having the same teachers through their high school years, the students are able to establish a bond with a significant other. There are no orphans. We believe it is essential to assure potential dropouts that a core group of teachers will stay with them through graduation."

". . . The local school districts . . . unless they act on behalf of the at-risk student, very little can happen."

Small Student Groups Mean We Care . . .

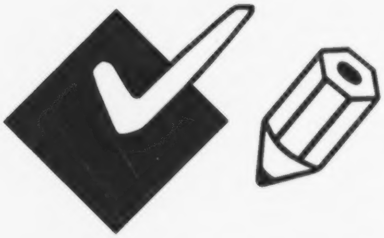
New York City

(Enrollment: 935,513; K-12)

Divide students into small groups so that they can get to know their teachers and acquire the feeling that they are not lost in large crowds. This is becoming a basic tenet in the education of potential dropouts. It is being applied in New York City public schools for ninth-graders under that district's "House Plan," which went into effect September 1987.

Why ninth-graders? Victor Herbert, coordinator of dropout programs for New York City, said: "We view the ninth year as almost a court of last resort. Early adolescence is a critical time when some students may decide that continuing in school is not the thing for them unless they see the value of getting a high school education and that someone cares enough for them to help them get a diploma. The House Plan structures the ninth grade in such a way that students can sense that we care. . . ."

School Issue: Easing Grade Level Transitions



As most educators know, schools lose their greatest number of students "between grades." This is especially true during times of transition between elementary and junior high or middle school, and between junior high or middle school and high school.

The middle school years are particularly important. George Melton of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, for example, feels that students who drop out of high school quite often form their at-risk behaviors in the middle school: "Although the physical act of droping out is usually a high school one, we do know that the mind set for dropping out is usually formed at the middle level. To some extent, students at risk have been stereotyped as impoverished, from single parent homes, drug abusers, etc. In reality, children from affluent, two parent homes are just as susceptible in the middle school years to at-risk behavior.

Following are examples of how four districts have developed programs to help students make it through difficult transition periods.

Give Attention to the Earliest Grades

Nashville, Tennessee
(Enrollment: 65,084; K-12)

The dropout problem has its roots in the early grades. Most educators subscribe to this principle, although not all districts do much about it. The Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Schools is one district that has its eyes on the progress of students in grades K through 3, as well as in grades 4 through 7, and seeks to build positive attitudes toward school in these elementary years.

T-1, T-4, T-7 are Nashville's devices — T for Transition, for preventing later day dropouts. "For students deemed at academic risk," says Nashville Director of Schools Charles O. Frazier, "the transition programs offer an additional year in which to grow and develop before moving into a more demanding level of schooling for which the student may show insufficient readiness."

To illustrate: The Transition Four (T-4) class is a one-year alternative remediation program. Classes are limited to 20 students. Individualized attention helps learners master reading, math skills, science, and social studies. T-4 classes receive the same services — that is, physical education, music, art — as regular grade 4 students. After one year in T-4, students are placed in the regular fourth grade.

What has been said about T-4 applies to T-7. Nashville officials add that, for seventh-graders, the transition program avoids the stigma of retention and provides opportunities for teachers to help students build attitudes of self-esteem for success in later grades.

Ensure Adjustment for Sixth Graders

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida
(Enrollment: 156,033; K-12)

In Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, sixth graders considered at risk for chronic school failure are helped through the Model School Adjustment Program (MSAP).

To be eligible to participate in the program, a student must:

- Have an average or above average I.Q.
- Be above the 35th percentile in reading and/or math.
- Not be eligible for special education programs.
- Have his or her parents agree to participate in the program.

Students must also exhibit any of the following characteristics: retention in one or more grades; failure in several subjects; record of truancy, excessive absences, or frequent tardiness; or a sudden drop in grades from one year to the next.

The MSAP is staffed at the school level by one program coordinator, a family counselor, and 30 trained peer tutors. Program goals and objectives address six program components: understanding learning strategies; social skills development; peer counseling, tutoring, behavior management, and family and group counseling.

Participating students receive four individual tutoring sessions per week and meet once a week with the family counselor to work on study skills and behavior management. An eight-week parenting class is held for participating parents.

Follow-up sessions are then conducted with the parents and the students during the summer and the year following initial participation in the program. The main objective of this follow-up is to focus parents and students back to behavioral and learning concepts, to form new goals, and to assess present needs for the new school year.

Evaluation reports of the pilot program are available for each of the three years the program has been in operation. A control group design was employed and criteria for comparison include disciplinary referrals, attendance data, promotion to the next grade, basic skills passed, Stanford Achievement test scores, honors, and pre- and post-standard scores on the Behavioral Rating Scale Profile, as well as parent, student, and teacher rating scales. Data based on comparison of the control group with the pre-post changes for the MSAP group demonstrate success.

Source: *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* of the National Dropout Prevention Center and National Dropout Prevention Network, Fall 1988 edition.

For information: Frank Campana, Principal, Driftwood High School, 2751 N.W. 70th Terrace, Hollywood, FL 33024; 305/985-3100.

Make Prevention the Focus of the Middle Grades

Cambridge, Massachusetts (Enrollment: 7,876; K-12)

The seventh and eighth grades are sensitive points in the dropout syndrome.

Cambridge, Massachusetts officials believe this so strongly that they are concentrating time, effort, and monies from a state grant on "hooking kids on school" while they are in the crucial middle grades and before they make the momentous transition to grade 9.

The transition from elementary school to high school is difficult for even the most solid students. It is a critical passage for most students. It is even more critical, said one Cambridge school official, "for the boys and girls with poor reading and math skills, with a high rate of absenteeism or truancy, discipline problems at home and at school, and with little or no participation in school activities." That, in brief, is a partial description of the at-risk student who faces, as he or she leaves middle school, the reality of a secondary education.

In 1985, Cambridge school officials began working on what eventually became part of the "Hooking Kids on School" dropout prevention project. When it became apparent that the state would approve a grant for this purpose (with matching funds, the sum would run to about $50,000), Cambridge decided to focus the money on grades 7 and 8 because "we were most concerned with primary prevention." Three of the district's 13 elementary schools explored ways to ease the transition between grades 8 and 9.

Each of the schools has students who have been identified as "at-risk" by the school staff using some standard measures. In addition, each enrolls other students who have difficulties of various types — they are not involved in the life of the school, have difficulty in classes, demonstrate behaviorial problems, or have troubles at home. To serve all students in each school, teachers and principals decided to look at the innovative programs already in existence for developing greater attachments of students to school and to expand and reinforce them. The result, so far, are four programs that work toward achievement of the goal "hooking kids on school."

School A:
The spirit of community

This school seeks to establish a working school community — a place where students and teachers work together; where students feel comfortable, accepted, appreciated, and supported; and where all those involved have a say in running the place. Administrators and teachers of this school believe that school-community involvement gives students a sense of ownership, teaches them to participate, and reduces apathy and alienation. A working school community, too, empowers students to make positive, responsible decisions.

How is this achieved? The school has established a student council, a grievance/mediation committee for students, and community meeting forums. Among issues dealt with at the forums have been the establishment of student rules, actions against stealing, ways to enforce school rules among the entire student body, and ways to expand student activities.

School B:
The Breakfast Club

A significant number of seventh- and eighth-grade students in this school have scored below grade level in comprehensive reading and math tests. Many also have difficulty in their regular math, science, and writing courses. For these students, the school opened a computer lab before school starts, from 7:00 to 7:45 a.m. It is called the Breakfast Club. The activity has evolved from the study of the LOGO language and is an extension of math, writing, and computer studies in the classroom.

The Breakfast Club is limited to no more than 15 students every morning. It operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Problems are introduced by the teacher and by the students; solutions are usually a group product. A number of students have written their own programs and have used them as a basis for academic activities on subsequent days.

"Here is an activity," said a Cambridge Breakfast Club supervisor, "which provides a secure base for students in math and computer studies, science, and writing without the pressure of grades."

School C:
Help for the bilingual student

This school has a substantial number of students from bilingual homes and, in recent

Overcoming the Hurdles of the Ninth Grade

The ninth grade is difficult for most students. It can be devastating for those who are at risk. So says the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

The difficulties of transition to high school affect most heavily students who already have a record of poor attendance, punitive discipline, and academic problems. "For these students," says ERIC, "the new high school is often proof that school is too trying or alien and that they cannot succeed."

School districts are experimenting with strategies to alleviate trouble spots in the ninth grade. ERIC sums up what districts are doing — and what your district, too, can consider doing:

Defer required courses. The majority of ninth-grade courses are required for high school graduation. Commonly, these courses are challenging and, at times, overwhelming for the student at risk. A student who fails one or more such courses can easily feel that his or her academic chances are over. ***Remedy:*** Shift some required courses to the tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grades. Such a move offers students opportunities for elective courses in the ninth grade and, at the same time, will provide them fuller and more challenging course loads when they reach the upper grades.

Sensitize teachers. Inservice sessions for teachers should give ample attention to the needs of at-risk students entering the ninth grade. ***Desirable steps:*** Schedule workshops and seminars dealing with problems of adolescence, how to study, how to prepare homework, and how to become part of school life. Assign the best and most experienced teachers to ninth-grade classes.

Orient middle school students to high school. Organize small groups of middle school students to visit high school, meet faculty, and tour the grounds and facilities. In counseling sessions with eighth-graders, review what high school is like, the nature of its courses, and how these courses differ from elementary school offerings. Stress the help the ninth-graders can get from teachers, counselors, and advisers.

Offer opportunities for shadowing. In this *ad hoc* procedure, a middle school student follows a high school student throughout part or all of the school day. All teachers and students are informed of the procedure and urged to make the student in a lower grade welcome during the shadowing process.

Set up orientation courses for incoming high school students. These may run from a short period on the first day of high school to one day a month of longer. In Seattle, orientation takes the form of a semester-long course for all entering ninth-grade students. Its title is "19XX," the two Xs denoting the year students will graduate. Classes are small and topics include expectations, rules for academic and social behavior, descriptions of projected courses of study, school organization and traditions, and where the student can get help. Seattle officials claim that orientation courses have helped reduce student dropout rates from 20 percent to 12 percent in the last 3 years.

Orient. Set up orientation for parents, parelleling those for ninth-grade students. **Aim:** to keep parents involved and informed as the ninth-graders begin adjustment to high school. **One effective approach:** Hold monthly programs for parents during the students' freshmen year and familiarize parents with grading systems, opportunities for remediation, and offerings available to students for work and career planning.

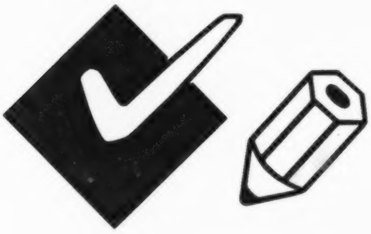
Articulate between grade levels. The most significant administrative action school officials can take to help ninth-graders stay in school is to improve articulation between the earlier years of schooling and high school," states ERIC. Articulation can be achieved when:

- Middle school and high school staffs hold periodic meetings during the year to review the counseling programs students need as they move toward high school, to propose and discuss curriculum changes, to analyze instructional materials for their suitability for at-risk students, and to initiate remedial and supportive services designed to keep students in school until graduation.
- Principals at all three levels visit schools to become acquainted with what schools "at the other levels" in their districts are doing to bring about coordination of the schooling process for all students.

years, many of them did not go on to the ninth grade. Apparently, the ninth-grade offerings, which did not include bilingual learning opportunities, constituted a serious barrier.

One answer to that problem was introduction of a method for teaching communications with software called QUILL, developed with a Harvard expert. QUILL was successful in assisting bilingual students in writing and social studies, and has been instrumental in leading students to the district's standard curriculum in grade 9. Additional teachers are now being trained to use QUILL to increase student interest in language arts and social studies.

School Issue:
Intervening in the Elementary Grades



"In a class of 30, a major portion of my time is occupied by problems of a few children — to their detriment, the detriment of others in the class, and my own well-being and sense of accomplishment."

This statement represents a common complaint by teachers throughout the nation. Typically, teachers express frustration at not having the time to assist troubled children.

To help both teachers and students in these perplexing situations, some 400 school districts have adopted the Primary Mental Health Project (PMHP), which originally was developed in 1958 at the University of Rochester. The program is based on research carried on by child psychologists, and special training manuals have been designed to help school districts detect and prevent emotional and learning problems in K-3 children.

This section explores how two districts have implemented the principles of the PMHP.

For information: Dr. Emory L. Cowen, P.M.H.P., University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14620. Telephone: 716/275-2547.

Special Friends Make the Difference

Fairfield-Suisun Unified
School District
Fairfield, California
(Enrollment: 16,000; K-12)

The Fairfield Suisun school district has installed "Just for Kids" on a pilot basis because, as Superintendent Ernest D. Moretti explains, "It is cost-effective . . . relatively uncomplicated to administer . . . and does a job that needs doing."

That job, in part, he says, "is to concentrate the attention of caring adults on those few children who have been diagnosed as needing specialized attention." This is achieved through a cooperative effort between the school district and a community-based agency — hence, the cost-effectiveness of Just for Kids.

Fairfield-Suisun's Just for Kids program is funded by a grant from the Department of Mental Health of Solano County, matched dollar for dollar by the local community. The school district's only requirement is to provide supervision of the program by its regular staff.

Fairfield-Suisun school officials believe that at-risk prevention programs must start in the early grades. Mark E. Reid, the district administrator in charge of the program, has stated the goals of Just for Kids in these words:

- The first objective is to modify the behavior of at-risk students so they will improve to the point where they will succeed in the classroom.

- A second objective is to improve educational programs for other students in the school. Some of the time, effort, and attention now spent by a teacher contending with the emotional and behavior problems of a few at-risk students may now be directed to instructional efforts put forth on behalf of all students.
- A third objective is to boost the morale of the instructional staff by providing support in the classroom for teachers responsible for the education of at-risk students.

Just for Kids identifies potential enrollees through standardized evaluation instruments administered by the district staff. Once the at-risk students have been identified, they are provided with immediate services by "special friends." The special friends work under professional supervision and are the most critical factor in the success of the program. It is their "natural helping" abilities that make the program work.

Special friends can be parents, graduate student interns, or high school seniors. They are selected jointly by the sponsoring agency and the school district, with the principal of the school making the final selection. They are paid a minimal salary by the agency, which also provides insurance and maintains fiscal responsibility for the program. Their training is provided by the agency in cooperation with the school district psychologists. At the school site, they are under direct supervision of the school principal.

Each child in the Just for Kids program receives one hour of service a week. The schedule may vary — once a week for 1 hour, or twice a week for 30 minutes. (Sometimes the twice-a-week plan is preferred because of the amount of reinforcement necessary when working with young children.) Students are in the program for the full school year.

When with their special friends, the children receive instruction on communications skills and take part in story-telling, therapeutic play, therapeutic drawing, puppet play, and other activities. But the critical factor in the success of the program is the undivided attention and love the child gets from the special friend.

The district psychologist meets regularly with the special friends to discuss cases, and assist in developing goals and treatment strategies.

Just for Kids uses a standardized assessment tool to measure the change in students' attitudes as the program goes along, with the principal and school psychologist monitoring the assessment. Results presented to the school board include the number of students served, an analysis of the assessments, and a survey of practices by the staff involved in the program.

For information: Mark E. Reid, Director, Adult Alternative and Continuation Education, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District, 1025 Delaware St., Fairfield, CA 94533-6197. Telephone: 707/427-7000.

Creative Play Boosts Potential

Park Ridge Public Schools, New Jersey
(Enrollment: 1,400; K-12)

Noting that a "substantial segment" of K-3 students were at risk of becoming disaffected, Park Ridge school officials drew on Chapter 1 funds for Program ZIPP
—Zeroing In on Pupil Potential.

"The program provides a minimum of two fully individualized half-hour sessions with each at-risk child each week," says Robert G. Balentine, superintendent of schools. "We've employed a resident full time to work with the youngsters individually."

In practice, the person plays rather than works with the kindergarten and first-grade children accepted into the program. "ZIPP offers the youngsters creative activities — games, crafts, puppet play, social play — in a warm, caring, school environment," reports Anna McHale, program coordinator. "The activities are designed to reinforce feelings of security, safety, personal worth, and well-being; and thus help the child participate successfully in the regular school program."

Referrals by teachers, school nurses, parents, or social workers are based on a child's exhibiting at least five of seven special needs:

- Inability to function adequately.
- Lack of achievement.
- Increasing absence or tardiness.
- Inadequate attention span.

Acceptance into the program depends on the permission of a child's parent(s). Conceptualized as preventive and supportive rather than punitive and remedial, ZIPP's positive effect on self-image nurtures and supports task completion and academic and social involvement through nonjudgmental responsiveness of an adult.

For information: Robert G. Balentine, Superintendent of Schools, 2 Park Ave., Park Ridge, NJ 07656. Telephone 201/930-4856.

A key question in the AASA survey on students at risk asked, "What characteristic is most often identified in students inevitably bound for failure?" One-fourth of the administrators responding had a clear answer: "Poor self-image." The respondents also described this characteristic as "low self-esteem," "Low self-concept," and "possessing negative attitudes toward self."

This section explores the relationship between self-esteem and student achievement, and the factors that most affect self-esteem. Examples of programs that help build self-esteem are also provided.

What the research shows and experts believe

In countless profiles of school dropouts and students at risk as painted by researchers and education leaders, students' low self-esteem, or negative feelings about themselves, loom large. Rhode Island education officials, for example, said: "Low self-concept may be the predominant factor contributing to the motivational and attitudinal deficiencies typical of dropouts."

A Vancouver, Washington, study found: "Bad feelings about one's self impact negatively on the learning ability of young people. Young people who think they are dumb, stupid, or useless tend to give up; they demonstrate feelings of 'I can't,' and 'It's too hard.' Such a state of mind does not allow for learning. Fear of failure, of ridicule, of looking bad to others is a dominant blockage of the insecure learner."

On the other hand, there is much in the literature and practice that underscores the positive role of self-esteem. Noted psychologist Carl Rogers, for example, asserts that a person's strong self-esteem contributes to one's ability to understand and solve one's problems and is conducive to mental health. He contends that nearly all individuals have within them resources for self-understanding and for positive behavior. It is the role of the teacher, counselor, or psychologist to help a student — any student — tap these resources. (Reference: *Client-Centered Therapy*, by Carl Rogers, Houghton-Mifflin, 1951.)

Alfred Adler postulates that humans have four basic needs: a close relationship with one other human being; a circle of personal friends; an occupation that provides opportunities to make a contribution (and school work can be such an occupation); and opportunities to work out one's patterns of life. Self-esteem works towards fulfilling these basic needs. (Reference: *Individual Psychology* by Alfred Adler, Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1959.)

A.H. Maslow, whose work is much cited and relied on by school counselors and psychologists, holds that the goal of every human being is self-actualization — that is, becoming the kind of person one wants to become. Self-esteem aids that drive. Self-esteem helps individuals to sense they can take charge of their lives. (Reference: *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, by A.H. Maslow, Penguin Books, 1971.)

Four phases of building self-esteem

Building self-esteem in students starts in the classroom — and continues through every lesson, every contact the teacher makes with the student, and every contact the student makes with the teacher.

The build-up process is subtle, ever-continuing — and takes a long time. While teacher and student are the prime actors in the process, administrators and parents have an important role: to support the teachers as they seek to carry out the phases of the process. The challenging aspects of building self-esteem, listed below, can be best carried out by teachers with the help of administrators.

1. The learning and teaching environment

It has been said that we shape our buildings, and the buildings shape us. So it is true of the physical space in which we teach, learn, work, and study. Our surroundings — and their contents — can enhance or dilute our inner resources. For positive effects on student self-esteem, educators should consider how the physical appearance of the classroom is shaping the minds of students. The teacher can:

- Keep his or her desk clean and organized.
- Make sure classroom floors, walls, shelves, and windows are clean and free of graffiti.
- Arrange student desks in a way that the seating plan does not discriminate against any student.
- Enlist students in creating classroom dis.plays of student work.
- Change displays periodically and keep them relevant.
- Get rid of commercial posters that have negative messages.
- Remove defaced books, pamphlets, and tattered materials obtained from outside sources.
- Work to make the classroom colorful, attractive, and relaxing.

- Put a meaningful quote on the board each week and discuss it with the class.

2. Instructional contacts

The daily lesson, with its countless interactions between teacher and student, provides the best opportunities for augmenting student self-esteem. Here are some ways teachers do it:

- Make clear their expectation that every student be on task, take part in discussions, and answer questions.
- Stress an attitude that every student has worth and has much to contribute to every lesson; accept all points of view.
- Repeat a question when necessary; simplify, if needed. And wait for answers. Many educators believe that student speed in response means little in the education of the mind.
- Avoid monopolizing classroom time. Also, do not allow any student to monopolize time. Students gain confidence from opportunities to participate.
- Never assign homework as punishment; but not accepting excuses for homework not being completed.
- Avoid surprise tests. Students gain confidence in dealing with subject matter when they know what's ahead.
- Encourage students to make "I" statements in the classroom — "I can," "I shall," "I'll do it." This results in ownership of responsibilities.
- Begin each class with something positive. End each class with acknowledgment — and thanks — for individual contributions.

3. Praise and recognition

Point out the mistake . . . find the error . . . criticize the fault.

Traditional school practices have relied heavily on such negative approaches. The psychology of building self-esteem in students tells us just the reverse is needed. Recognition for good work and praise are two potent forces for an individual's self-esteem. Suggestions for teachers and other staff members include:

- Praise specific tasks, not necessarily the individual who performed them.
- Praise a student's breakthrough or the overcoming of difficulties.
- Provide awards for student improvement in behavior and achievement.
- Create opportunities for students to write praise letters to other students, teachers, the principal, parents, and the support staff.
- Stress the positive aspects of students with other teachers.
- Phone parents to give positive praise. Stress the capabilities of students, and pass on facts about a student's improvement in achievement and behavior.
- Prepare bulletin board displays that feature students' good work in the classroom, in the school, and in the community.

4. Relations between teacher and student

A teacher's actions speak louder than words, but a teacher's attitude toward students may speak loudest. Students will inevitably "catch on" whether the teacher respects them, thinks them worthy, believes they are special, or has an interest in their well-being.

Teachers can help bolster self-esteem when they:

- Speak with respect to every student, as if each were the best student and a friend.
- Communicate feelings about the value of a student's friendship.
- See when a student is "down," and indicate that they notice, care, and are willing to help.
- Listen to students. Effective teachers tell students of their intention to make time for listening; set specific appointments with students to visit in private; and keep their part of the appointment, even if the student fails to show up.
- Show students that they are interested not only in school work, but also in students' lives outside school — their hobbies, interests, and home- or peer-related problems. They encourage students to share their personal experiences with them.
- Always talk and act as if they believe students are capable.

Will it work?

The 30 or so suggestions above constitute a panoply of challenging actions teachers can take to enhance students' self-esteem. Probably no teacher can act on all the suggestions — even with the help of administrators. The list's value lies in its range. It points up that the development of self-esteem in students depends little on pep talk and exhortation; but much on actions that affect the learning environment, on what happens in the classrom, on award of sincere praise and recognition of achievement and behavior, and on relations between student and teacher.

How can educators determine if these actions will work? The principal authors of this list, Paul W. Koziey (a member of the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta) and Dennis Brophy (a member of the Public School Board, Leduc, Alberta, Canada) say: "Indicators might include how often students stay after class to help, to talk, confide in you, invite you to witness their endeavors, tell about their personal lives and dreams, say they want to be like you, or come to see you when you don't formally teach them anymore."

Helping the teachers

In the large task of building student self-esteem, teachers need the help of their district. Here are six districtwide actions school administrators can take:

- Provide inservice for classroom teachers on ways to bolster the self-esteem of students.
- Provide inservice for counselors (and those carrying on counseling duties) on developing and maintaining student self-esteem.
- Review and analyze district policies and regulations on student discipline to see that minority and at-risk students are not subject to undue, unfair, or excessive disciplinary actions damaging to their self-esteem.

Institute and maintain a districtwide system of rewards and incentives for academic and extracurricular performance for *all* students.

- Rebuild (if necessary) and enlarge the extracurricular program in all schools to engage the interest and time of *all* students, regardless of economic or scholastic backgrounds.
- Promote, building by building, dress-up days; pep and *esprit de corps* rallies and assemblies devoted to student worth.

Self-Discipline:
The Master Key to Self-Esteem

If, as psychologist Carl Rogers has said, "Self-esteem contributes to one's ability to understand and solve one's problems," self-discipline may be the key to unlocking and enhancing that esteem.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about self-discipline, according to AASA's publication, *Self-Discipline: Helping Students Succeed*, "is that it grows from and, yes, enhances, self-esteem. Thus, self-discipline involves more than 'just saying no.' The truth is, helping students develop self-discipline involves helping them to say 'yes' — accepting goals for appropriate behavior and deciding to act responsibly to meet those goals."

According to *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, a study of British schools, the most important thing schools did to improve student achievement was to foster self-discipline. Students who have self-discipline, according to the AASA booklet, "have the strength and the perseverance to pursue *and achieve* any goal. . . . Without it, goals might be set, but never met."

Both schools and parents can help foster self-discipline by providing good examples, such as being punctual, keeping commitments, taking care of their health through proper nutrition and exercise and striving for excellence.

Schools can help parents help their children build self-discipline and self-esteem by encouraging parents to:

- Enforce family rules about bedtime, not eating sweets before meals, picking up toys at the end of the day, and the like.
- Expect their children to assume some responsibilities, such as keeping their rooms neat, completing homework, and caring for pets.
- Establish orderly routines at home and let children know clearly what is expected of them to reduce parental discipline and increase self-discipline.

According to the AASA booklet, perhaps the most important thing schools and parents can do to build students' self-discipline is "to hold high expectations" for them and to communicate those expectations. Another important strategy is to recognize and reward self-disciplined behavior. The booklet cautions, however, against overemphasizing awards — which might "acutally lower self-esteem by giving students the impression that hard work will always lead to an immediate, tangible reward." It is far more effective in the long run, the author states, for students to be noticed and praised for their efforts to improve behavior or academic work.

Rip, Rip, Rip: What Happened to Billy's Self-Esteem

Scene: An inservice training session in a midwestern junior high school. The theme is "What's Happening to Billy's Self-Esteem?"

The inservice leader explains: "We're going to demonstrate the effect our words and deeds have on a student's self-image. We'll use role-playing and a bit of mock dramatization. I have some volunteers here from the staff and they'll take on a number of roles for this sketch — classroom teacher, counselor, coach, principal, and so forth. Let's begin."

Enter, center stage: Billy, eighth-grader. A large sheet of newsprint covers the front of his body, carrying the letters IALAC.

The inservice director explains: "The letters stand for I Am Lovable and Capable. We've already had a bit of rehearsal in this, so you know that whenever you make a negative or derogatory remark to Billy, I'll tear off a piece of the newsprint. I know that we're all good and kind and friendly people, but for purposes of this demonstration, let's recall some of the things that have been said to Billy during the past term, which wittingly or unwittingly, advertently or not, may have damaged his self-esteem. And let's pledge not to make such statements again. Let's begin."

Homeroom teacher: Billy, why do you always come to school with that T-shirt? Next time, you'll be sent home to change. (Rip)

English teacher: That spelling test I gave the class was easy. But you missed 12 words. You'll have to write each one correctly 50 times. (Rip)

Art teacher: You call that picture a sunrise? Looks more like a rainy day to me. You're wasting your time in my art class. (Rip)

Social studies teacher: Why aren't you finished with the test? Everyone else is. Never mind trying to finish. Just let me have your paper. (Rip)

Drama coach: Well, well, well. So you want to try out for a part in the play. I'm sorry, but I just don't see you in this play. (Rip)

Science teacher: Put you hand down, Billy, You can't answer this question. Zelda, you answer, please. (Rip)

Detention room supervisor: Yes, yes, Billy. I've been expecting you. Take your regular seat and keep quiet. (Rip)

Counselor: I can't recommend you for that job after school. You'll make a fool of yourself and of me, too. (Rip)

Principal: So you're back here in my office again. Who sent you this time? No matter, I don't think any teacher can put up with you. (Rip)

Only a few shreds are now left of the once proud sign IALAC. The inservice training leader concludes the skit:

"As teachers and staff members, we probably use these types of statements only once in a long while. But the cumulative effect of even occasional derogatory words can be devastating on a student. Need we wonder that happened to Billy's self-esteem?"

— Adopted from material provided by the
Teen Outreach Program of the
Association of Junior Leagues, Inc.

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Using Praise and Awards

Gainesville, Florida
(Enrollment: 23,200; K-12)

Because praise and recognition help students gain self-esteem, the board of education of Alachua County and the area chamber of commerce sponsor RAISE (Recognizing Achievement in Secondary Education) awards. Through the program, approximately 600 ninth- and tenth-grade students from six high schools receive recognition and medals for academic achievement each year.

At the beginning of the school year, representatives from business, government, medicine, and law enforcement appear at student assemblies to stress the importance of staying in school. They are urged to compete for medals in basic subject matter, as well as in community involvement and citizenship activities. Teachers are responsible for selecting winners. All students are eligible and awards are based on "demonstrable achievement and improvement."

Letting Potential Dropouts Be Tutors

San Antonio, Texas
(Enrollment: 61,168; K-12)

In San Antonio, potential dropouts develop their self-esteem by tutoring younger classmates. This is the claim, and apparent outcome, of an experiment carried on as part of San Antonio's Valued Youth Partnership. The Partnership is sponsored by the board of education in conjunction with Coca Cola, U.S.A. Here is how Dr. Alicia Salinas Sosa, a Partnership coordinator, describes what is going on:

"Potential dropouts in the seventh and eighth grades and in high school are designated as tutors in math and reading. After going through training in tutoring skills, the upper-grade students are deployed to nearby elementary schools to work as tutors and teacher aides with younger, mostly Mexican-American youngsters, earn an hourly wage of $3.65.

"Why does the experiment work in deterring potential dropouts from leaving school? Because they are placed in leadership positions and taken seriously. The venture gives the upper-grade students a chance to get behind the teacher's desk: They get insight into the problems of dealing with young learners, they begin to feel responsible for their younger charges, and they often see concrete results of their work."

According to San Antonio officials, only 4 percent of the 100 tutors dropped out of school in 1986, compared to 45 percent of potential dropouts in the upper grades who were not in the program.

Challenging Students to Enroll

Show Low, Arizona
(Enrollment, 1,878; K-12)

One student — let's call her Beth — wanted to be an architect. The Challenge Program in Show Low, Arizona, enabled her to embark on a rigorous jogging and weight training program, backpack the Rockies, and learn from a local architect to read blueprints — all in preparation for designing and building a summer cabin. She then donated it to Show Low's Parks and Recreation Department for use as a teen recreation center.

Beth met her challenge in a district where 60 percent of the elementary and 80 percent of the secondary students are considered to be at risk of low self-esteem, poor family relationships, deficient communication skills, and lack of motivation.

"Challenge is designated to help students move from adolescence to adulthood," said Bea Arroe-Siner, director of support services at Show Low High School. "We look for an integration of five kinds of challenge in the individual student's program: physical, emotional, practical, creative, and service."

Challenge projects are initiated by students themselves, with advisory committees of at least one teacher, a parent, and the program coordinator. Once student and committee agree, project plans are confirmed by formal contract. Learning experiences are intense — compressed in time and effort toward singular goals. They are characterized by individual and group decision making, self-direction, and "real world" significance.

The Show Low Challenge Program is modeled after Maurice Gibbons' Walkabout Program, which has been in successful operation since the early 1970s. Gibbons, a professor at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, was led to developing his Walkabout plan after he saw a film by the same name, depicting how a young aborigine, a native Australian boy, went through a six-month-long endurance test in the wilderness and returned to his tribe an adult.

Inspired, Gibbons wrote an article, "Walkabout: Searching for the Right Passage from Childhood to School." It was published in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1974, and thus launched the Walkabout movement. Challenge, described here, is an adaptation of Gibbons' proposals.

For information: Dr. Bea Arroe-Siner, Director of Support Services, Show Low High School, 500 West Old Linden Road, Show Low, AZ 85901. Telephone: 602/537-8409

Tailoring Training for Teens

Holland Patent Central School District, New York (Enrollment: 2,100, K-12)

In the Holland Patent Central School District, William E. Whitehill has developed a unique project for students at risk. He calls it "Teen Themes," and describes it as an "inservice day for students."

Whitehill estimates that of his 2,100-student body, only 5 percent of elementary students and 10 percent of secondary students are at risk. Yet he says many more are likely to be affected by "identity crisis, poor self-image, and the consequences of a weak home structure." In addition, district officials are concerned about alcohol and drug abuse, poor peer relationships, loneliness, and poor role models.

Teen Themes succeeds in addressing those areas of concern and does so with considerable community involvement.

In preparation for the 1986 event, all 750 of the students in grades 9 through 12 in Holland Patent High School were asked to mark 3 of 20 workshop topics as first choice, 3 as second choice, and 3 as third choice. A wide selection of topics not only facilitates equitable assignment of students per workshop; it also means that all students can enroll in the workshops of particular interest to them.

The 1986 program, tailored to student concerns, included workshops on "skinny kids," stress management, student anxiety about testing, substance abuse, one-parent families, and suicide prevention. One workshop offered first-hand experiences of a reformed teenage alcoholic; another, a review of sexually transmitted diseases.

Among professionals from the surrounding area who made presentations — most volunteering their time — were nurses, counselors, therapists, a minister, a dietitian, a psychologist, and a nutritionist. Tim Green, an All-American from Syracuse University, joined Holland Patent's head football coach in a discussion of "Guiding the Student Athlete from High School to College." A representative of Mohawk Valley's Planned Parenthood Association and a counselor from Catholic Charities shared a session on sexuality: "Is Sex Really the 'In' Thing?"

Planning involves many

Teen Themes is a concentrated effort on the part of parents, administrators, teachers, and guidance staff, Whitehill reports. "The guidance staff and community education representative, together with our pupils-at-risk task force, developed most of the ideas for carrying it out."

The planning committee and its various subcommittees include parents, student council representatives, and personnel from almost every sector of the school district staff. The committee is responsible for publicity, scheduling, hospitality, lunch, liaison with faculty, and student involvement. Faculty members are asked to suggest themes and speakers for workshops and to volunteer for specific assignments. They, along with presenters and students, also are asked to evaluate each workshop day and recommend improvements.

Whitehill stresses the importance of public information. "Even with parent involvement in planning," he says, "some topics will still cause concern among members of the community. We try to give out as much information as possible so that parents and others will clearly understand the intent and content of the program." Releases to newspapers, radio, and television are supplemented with announcements sent home from the schools.

While Holland Patent's first Teen Themes was planned in three months, district officials recommend six months of planning. "There are simply more details to be nailed down and more people to involve than can be properly accommodated in three months," Whitehill says. "You need to involve as many people as possible, do all the scheduling, prepare packets, and make all kinds of arrangements with participants for presentations. You'll need at least that much time."

Budget, on the other hand, can be modest. Holland Patent carried out its first Teen Themes for less than $800. The money went for a keynote speaker, guest lunches, substitute pay for two teacher-presenters, and miscellaneous items for amenities, such as flowers on lunch tables.

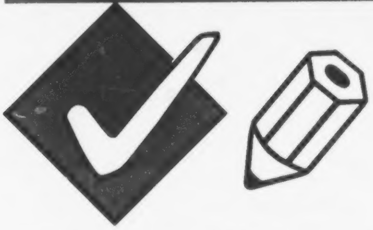
Measuring outcomes

Holland Patent uses three means of evaluating Teen Themes:

- The number of positive statements by students, speakers, and staff. Most are compiled from brief questionnaires handed out after the program; others are heard informally during conversation.
- Increases in the number of students who visit guidance offices or approach teachers to seek help or gather information on topics related to those presented in the workshops.
- Increased enthusiasm for, and participation in, planning future "Teen Themes" by staff and students.

For information: William E. Whitehill, Jr., Superintendent of Schools, Holland Central School, Main St., Holland Patent, NY 13354. Telephone: 315/865-4101.

School Issue: Turning to Technology



No report on at-risk students would be complete without a discussion of technology. This is true because many educators have found that the microcomputer is the most effective tool for teaching students at risk. It often succeeds when all other instructional methods have failed.

In fact, the importance of technology to helping students at risk has been the topic in much of the literature and at a number of conferences. One of the conferences, held in 1987, was initiated by the Agency for Instructional Technology and conducted in cooperation with eight American and Canadian educational organizations, including AASA. Among conference presenters were Richard Green, then superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools; Harold Hodgkinson, senior fellow with the American Council on Education; David Hornbeck, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools; and Ted Hasselbring of the Learning Technology Center at Vanderbilt University.

From the conference proceedings, participants gained a clear understanding of the advantages of putting the microcomputer at the center of learning for at-risk students. These advantages include the following:

- The learning is individualized and self-paced.
- Feedback from the computer is "patient and nonjudgemental."
- The learner is in charge — autonomy is a quality that many at-risk students need and want.
- The microcomputer, with its immense memory, can provide simulations that are useful in mathematics, science, and social studies.
- Microcomputers enable students to become generators, rather than consumers, of knowledge.
- Finally, computerized word processing makes revising and editing written work easy, so that students are motivated to write longer and more complex material.

To deliver these advantages to the at-risk student calls for teachers (and administrators) who can use microcomputer technology. And there is the rub: At present, teachers and other staff members usually are not adequately prepared to do so. Needed are widespread inservice and preservice programs, according to one expert, "through which teachers will be led gently to the many uses of the microcomputer, rather than having this technology thrust upon them." In sum, technology is useless without the will and the ability to use it.

Districts that take the microcomputer seriously for improving instruction generally report satisfaction with results and testify to the computer's positive impact on the at-risk student. Here are several examples of a number of successful programs nationwide.

Indian Springs, Justice Illinois (Enrollment: 2,300; K-8)

In the Indian Springs School District, school officials report that computer-assisted and computer-managed instruction has been "a factor in above-the-norm achievement with a school population having a high percentage of at-risk students." The quoted words are from comments by the district's superintendent, Arvid Nelson.

Superintendent Nelson estimates that, of the 2,300 children in Indian Springs' 5 elementary schools, up to 25 percent are at risk. "The power of technology is crucial to the success of our schools in serving at-risk students," he says. Here are the ways technology helps:

General computer-assisted instruction is provided for all students in all grades. And because each classroom in the district has a microcomputer connected to the central computer, each teacher can call up any student's cumulative record — and even a parent's telephone number at work. Using the computer, teachers find it easy to track a student's progress in reading. Twice a year, parents receive a word-processed letter that outlines reading goals for their children and records whether the students have reached these goals. After each diagnosis, students who are having difficulty in reading are given a new set of resources to help them overcome their reading problems.

Escambia County, Pensacola, Florida
(Enrollment: 39,228; K-12)

In Pensacola, Florida, the Escambia County School District established remedial programs for high school students who are below grade level and judged to be at risk of failure to graduate. "The results have been remarkable — one month's growth in reading or mathematics for every hour a student spent with the remedial system," exclaimed Escambia County Superintendent Michael Holloway.

Superintendent Holloway reported that 35 percent of high school students in Escambia County dropped out of school in 1986, but technology is beginning to stem that trend. This is how technology is helping:

Working with a private industry council, the school district set up countywide computer-assisted instruction in basic math and reading. If a student makes a 1.5-year improvement in either reading or math, the private industry council pays the school system $348. "So far, we've earned $83,000 in reimbursement," Superintendent Holloway reports.

More important to the school system is that students want to spend as much time as they can with the computer, so they "keep coming to school" and mastering basic math and reading skills.

Escambia school officials cite the comments of one student who said: "I like getting problems right and I like what the computer says when I do. It says, 'Good. Great. Excellent.' " To which one school official responded: "For students who have fallen so far behind grade level that they don't hear those words in their regular classrooms, it's a wonderful new experience."

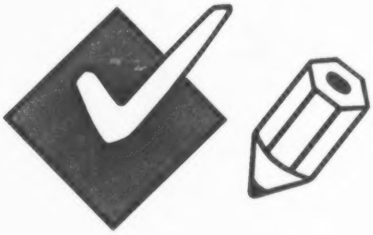
Here is additional recent testimony:

Chicago, Illinois — "We see an average grade-level improvement of 9 months in reading and 1 year in math with students who use the computer 15 minutes a day, 4 days a week, for 8 months." — Floyd Banks, principal, Williams Elementary School

Jefferson County, Kentucky — "We find computers an effective tool to kindle interest and to help students with low achievement improve their basic skills." — Buell Snyder, program director, Jefferson County Schools

Walton County, Florida — "In targeting the at-risk students, we would be putting another label on this already much-labeled group of students. Instead, we decided to serve the entire student population with computer-assisted instruction and to mainstream that at-risk boy and girl. Through the management system of the computer, we are able to track the at-risk students, see how they are doing, and come to their help as needed." — Andy Howard, director of Project Uplift, Walton County Schools

School Issue: Using Extracurricular Activities



Can extracurricular activities help save the dropout?

In school districts across the nation, educators are taking part in newly sparked discussions on the nature of student activities and their possibilities for reducing the dropout problem. The research and their actual experiences with extracurricular programs for at-risk youth are promising, too.

Reports and findings

A recent study by the New York Alliance for Public Schools confirmed that extracurricular activities might make the difference in retaining at-risk students because of their psychological impact. The study of successful junior high schools with largely minority student bodies found that, in many cases, "extra" curricular activities are truly the alternative curriculum, providing two major keys to learning motivation: relevance and the promise of potential success. These activities may provide the catalyst that unlocks the mind closed to learning.

Another report, *Children in Need,* published in 1988 by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, also put great emphasis on extracurricular activities:

"Extracurricular activities should become a more important part of school programs. Many disadvantaged children have single parents who work or two parents who work full time. Some have no parental guidance whatsoever or are responsible for the care of younger children. And those who do have adequate adult supervision can nonetheless benefit from enrichment activities outside of the normal classroom setting. . . .

"They also provide important invisible curriculum lessons and a variety of new physical, intellectual, and cultural challenges for which there may not be time during the academic day. We believe that these activities can provide a critical counterpoint to the boredom and idleness that can often lead to drug use and other negative behavior. Many of these activities can be jointly sponsored by the schools, community groups, and even businesses."

Other literature on extracurricular activities reveal such conclusions as these:

- A common characteristic of successful people was their involvement in student activities while in school.
- Students participating in extracurricular activities are less likely to become dropouts than those who do not have a record of participation.
- Most dropouts had limited extracurricular participation and a strong feeling of "not belonging."
- Dropouts often complain about their schools' inadequate provision for better interpersonal relations and lack of concern for leisure-time activitiies.

Basic questions

Discussions about extracurricular activites and their relation to dropouts raise some basic questions. Here are the questions, along with answers gathered from both research and experience.

1. What are the functions and values of student activities?

Student activities fulfill those objectives usually not adequately served by the regular curriculum. Authorities believe:

- Organized student activities give students feelings of acceptance and success.
- Activities promote friendly relationships between students, teachers, and other staff.
- Activities vitalize subject matter and motivate students.
- Activities promote student leadership.
- Activities help students explore occupational fields.
- Activities help students bring out hidden talents and develop new interests.
- Activities promote student morale.

2. What are the roles of school and staff?

"Regardless of the school's size, the offering of a student activity program is a must," concluded a recent group of proponents for these activities.

The school principal must provide major support for student activities. That support "not only raises the morale of club sponsors, but also enhances the prestige of student activities in the school building."

Every student organization needs to be guided by a dedicated adviser capable of organizing and guiding student groups. Inservice for supervision of student activities often raises the quality of student participation.

From eight research studies comes this composite view of the kind of staff supervision needed for student activities:

- The individual in charge of directing student activities must be enthusiastic, creative, well-organized, and have a strong commitment to the program.
- If paid personnel are not available, principals should recruit volunteers from the community, giving special attention to their credentials and abilities.
- Unfortunately, too many activity advisers are neither adequately prepared nor are they suited by temperament to supervising student clubs.
- Appointment of qualified advisers should be on an annual basis.

3. Why do student activity groups succeed?

Researchers have identified four reasons for successful student group activities:

- The group has a definite and well-defined purpose.
- The group has good adult leadership.
- Students and sponsor have a common understanding of the club's purposes and procedures and share information on a frequent and friendly basis.
- Principal, parents, and the community support the activity.

4. Why do student groups fail?

Again, researchers provide clues. Groups fail because:

- Leaders become disappointed, feel let down, and grow tired
- Few students take part in the activity and the number of participants drops as the school year progresses
- Principals do not provide for adequate time or meeting space and do not allocate even the barest of budgets for the groups' activities.

Call to action

Richard Hartley, a youth leader in the state of West Virginia, expounds the view that student activities are directly related to the dropout problem.

"Lack of participation is a characteristic of most dropouts," says Hartley. "One could assume that a meaningful experience in an activity can help keep a student in school rather than becoming a dropout." As one measure, Hartley urges West Virginia county schools to introduce wide-ranging programming in 4-H activities.

Here are Hartley's main points in urging educators to sponsor broad student activities programs.

- Going to school is often not the common experience for students that it should be. Students are separated by age, abilities, grade groupings, and sub-groupings. At a time when educators are searching for answers to student alienation, low student self-concepts, apathy, and "disconnection," a logical starting point might be extracurricular programs, student clubs, and organizations.
- Extracurricular activites should be an integral part of the school, and students should not be excluded from them because of grades, attendance policies, or economic or ethnic backgrounds.
- School administrators should become actively involved in expanding "the third curriculum of student activities." Administrators have a number of roles in this connection. First, there is the task of helping school boards establish, or reassert, policy supporting student activities. Second, there is the administrative responsibilty of recruiting, selecting, and preparing adult sponsors for student clubs, both from among the faculty and the community. Then there is the task of public information and community support.

Says Hartley: "Educational leaders must take the initiative in convincing the community that student activities are a constructive force compatible with democratic principles. Educators need to help parents recognize that every child should spend some of his or her time — running from three to six hours a week — developing interests and skills in organized activities. Guidelines for developing and conducting student activities should be worked out with the help of students, parents, teachers, administrators, board members, and community groups."

Marion County, West Virginia
(Enrollment: 10,990; K-12)

Marion County school officials heeded Richard Hartley's advice and, in 1987, introduced the 4-H program into each of the county's 32 elementary and middle schools housing grades 5 through 8.

"Four-H clubs for the high schools will be introduced later, after we've accumulated some experience in running these groups for elementary students," said Mike Call, coordinator of dropout prevention for the county. Coordinator Call expects the 4-H curriculum to be a potent factor in alleviating the dropout rate in the county. He and Superintendent John Myers have faith in the 4-H clubs as measures that will provide students noncompetitive and successful learning experiences and "help students develop positive relationships with others."

Call goes beyond these two immediate goals. He and the district's teachers have agreed that 4-H groups could also be conducted toward the following objectives:

- To improve the decision-making skills of youth.
- To provide training for successful participation in group activities.
- To improve the self-concepts of students.

Marion County officials also look to a spinoff:

They believe the 4-H clubs will encourage parents and other adults to share their time, skills, and talents with students and with the schools.

During the first few months of 1988, the schools and the county 4-H organization worked out the procedures for the program. They agreed that 4-H groups will meet at a site other than the classroom where and when possible. Students elect their own officers; and the officers, in turn, work under the guidance of adult leaders. Students select their own projects — which may range from photography to carpentry to dressmaking or animal husbandry.

Projects vary in length and complexity. Some are completed within the class period; others run for several weeks. Students get opportuities to conduct business meetings, to follow parliamentary procedures, and to guide projects to successful completion. School building administrators are expected to provide teachers and other staff members, as leaders, to schedule and coordinate activities and to assist in their evaluation. The County 4-H is expected to help recruit volunteer leaders from the community, provide for their training, and offer resources for student projects.

Special note: Vocational education also offers many opportunities for establishing youth organizations with goals and objectives similar to those of the 4-H. These include Future Farmers of America (FFA), Vocational-Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Future Homemakers of America/Home Economics Related Occupations (FHA/HERO), and Technical Education Students of America (TESA).

Cambridge, Massachusetts (Enrollment: 7,876; K-12)

The staff of one school in the Cambridge, Massachusetts, school system discovered — almost by accident — a team sports activity sponsored by the 4-H clubs that advocates say helps at-risk youth gain important life skills; the kind difficult to come by except in a competitive activity where teamwork is essential.

Called "Double Dutch," the activity requires two jump ropes, twirled in eggbeater fashion between two twirlers while one or two persons jump. This actually is an ancient sport, brought to the continent by Dutch settlers more than 300 years ago, but recently "discovered" in New York City as a useful activity for both boys and girls in grades 4 through 8.

In 1987, some 20 Cambridge students participated in the activity, guided by a teacher-coach. (The activity is part of the district's "Hooking Kids on School" project.) In addition to life skills, participants learned the value of physical activity and good nutrition; gained an understanding of stress and its effects on their bodies and lives; and became interested in the team — and through that — in their school.

"Double Dutch is especially useful for young women," the teacher-coach explained. "It helps them gain self-esteem and make wise decisions about their bodies." Some proponents of Double Dutch see it as a deterrant to teen pregnancy.

Do Higher Standards Push Out Students?

The movement of reform in education, sparked by the excellence reports of the 1980s, may have an unwanted effect on a quarter of all American students.

Two views:

1. "Raising the standards for graduation may increase the dropout and pushout rate." — Harold Hodgkinson, Institute for Educational Leadership
2. "The reforms that are being placed (in American schools) are being placed on the backs of children. We are increasing standards without providing the remedial and financial resources to help students."

—Samuel G. Sava,
National Association of
Elementary School Principals

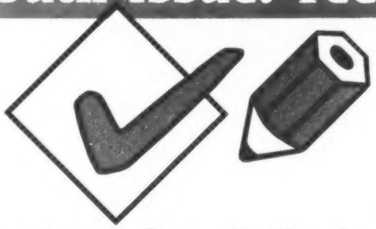
Programs and Strategies that Address Specific Youth Issues

Some of the issues involved in effectively addressing the problem of at-risk youth call for schools to develop significant involvement of and cooperation with a wide variety of community agencies. Schools are beginning to develop coordinated youth issues plans that deal with the impact such problems as teen pregnancy, delinquency, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, single parents, and poverty have on young people.

In this section we will look at programs that deal with some of these areas of troubled teen life:

- **Pregnancy**
- **Drug and alcohol abuse**
- **Personal crisis and suicide.**

Youth Issue: Teenage Pregnancy



The chances for productive lives are slim for teenagers who drop out of school because of pregnancy, fail to find gainful employment for lack of education, and give birth to babies of low birth weight who often require extensive medical care.

As the Children's Defense Fund discovered, teenage mothers are twice as likely as other mothers to become dependent on welfare. The Center for Population Options holds that, of those women who become mothers before the age of 20, only 2 percent will ever graduate from college.

Because of the impact of teenage pregnancy on students, their offspring and, eventually, our society, schools are taking a closer look at the problem and rethinking solutions.

The problem

- Each day of the week, more than 3,000 teenage girls in the United States become pregnant.
- This year, 1 of every 11 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 will become pregnant.
- Annually, close to a million pregnancies, mostly unwanted, will result in more than 500,000 births and almost as many abortions among girls under 20.
- The teen pregnancy rate in the United States is one of the highest in the western world — more than twice as high as the rates in England, France, or Canada; almost 3 times as high as the rate in Sweden and 7 times as high as that in the Netherlands.

"Unacceptable," "devastating," and "chilling" is how the problem of teenage pregnancy was viewed by the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families in 1987. After holding long, intensive hearings on teenage pregnancy, the Committee concluded that, "helping prevent pregnancies among young teens and reducing the social and economic risks for teenage parents and their children remain very serious challenges to this nation."

The Committee members lamented that "we have no focused approach to solving (this problem). . . The efforts that do exist are too few, uncoordinated, and lack significant support. . . ."

Much effort underway

Although the Committee's judgment might be justified, it is a fact that much effort is being put forth across the nation to address the problem of teenage pregnancy.

A task force of the national Governors' Association in 1987 reviewed community activities concerned with teenage pregnancy and devised a list of what "can be safely recommended to all states and all communities."

From the start, members of the task force were clear on one point: Actions seeking to reduce teenage pregnancy must involve parental groups, hospitals, public health agencies, welfare services, civic and community groups — and the schools. But such actions must be both encouraged and coordinated by state-level authority.

That is why the governors' task force's goal is to set up Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Councils. One such council, established in 1985 by the Connecticut General Assembly, is reporting success in prompting schools, parents, and municipal health agencies to make teenage pregnancy prevention "a high priority."

As school districts take up the questions of what to do about the challenge of teenage pregnancy, they are thrust into debates regarding the sex education curricula. They and their communities must consider two main issues:

- How to restructure and expand sex education/family life education to prevent pregnancies.
- What to do for the pregnant and parenting teenager.

Reviewing traditional sex education

There are as many opinions on what constitutes effective, helpful, or proper; or enough or too much sex education as there are parents. According to the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., "Today, most schools include some discussion about sexuality in the curriculum. Yet, only about 1 in 10 students receives more than 40 hours of instruction. Today, the number of states that mandate AIDS education is nearly three times larger than the number of states mandating comprehensive human sexuality education. As a result, many teens still believe such myths as, 'You can't get pregnant the first time you have intercourse.' "

Schools have a responsibility to work with the communities to develop a curriculum providing accurate information at an early age. As the Maryland Department of Education has noted in its guidelines for sex education, "Schools cannot supplant the role played by family and religion in values education, but they can reinforce positive attitudes and behavior and counteract negative influences on students."

In recent years, the staples of traditional sex education — physical differences between males and females and the physiology of reproduction — have been bolstered by such topics as:

- Facts about pregnancy and childbirth
- Consequences of teen pregnancy
- Parenthood responsibilities
- Role of contraceptives
- Sexually-transmitted diseases
- Sexual decision-making
- Characteristics of love relationships.

Models are emerging for well-structured, in-depth sex education programs. One that is widely acclaimed is the "Family Life/Sex Education" program in Falls Church, Virginia. It consists of four elective courses: two quarter-long courses for seventh- and ninth-graders and two semester-long courses for eighth-graders and high school seniors. Content includes anatomy, physiology, reproductive process, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, aging, and death. The extent to which this well-known program reduces or increases sexual activity on the part of students remains unmeasured. The developing feeling among sex educators is that sex education must begin in the earliest years and be linked with other learning experiences that help students develop appropriate attitudes toward themselves. Such experiences should help promote:

- Self-esteem.
- Self discipline.
- Goal setting.
- A sense of one's future and life options, especially with regard to vocational choices.
- Responsibility for one's health.

Helping teens before and after pregnancy

To further help teens ward off unwanted pregnancy and to assist those who do become pregnant, more and more districts are considering school-based health clinics. Although doing so often is accompanied by controversy, evidence is mounting in favor of these clinics.

When sex education is combined with clinic services at an accessible location, researchers note a reduction in the rate of teen pregnancy. Research on sex education reported by Douglas Kirby for Network Publications in Santa Cruz in 1984 proves this point. Kirby is the research director for the Center for Population Options.

The researchers evaluated nine different prevention programs and compared their relative effectiveness. Programs studied were:

- A comprehensive, semester-long course for juniors and seniors.
- A one-year course for juniors and a semester seminar for seniors.
- A one-year freshman course and a semester-long junior-senior seminar.
- An integrated K-12 program.
- A five-session course in school, complemented by a child-parent program.
- A six-session course in school, supplemented by a peer education program.
- A 16-session course for youth groups.
- An all-day conference.
- A high school education/health clinic program.

While the first eight of these programs show that students' *knowledge* of the risks of premature sex, pregnancy, and childbirth increased, none of the eight significantly increased or decreased rates of sexual intercourse among the students. Further, none of the non-clinic programs had a significant impact upon uses of birth control.

"Only the education/clinic approach," reported Kirby, "increased the use of birth control and substantially reduced the number of births. It also increased the proportion of pregnant adolescents who remained in school and decreased the number of repeat pregnancies among them."

Similar conclusions have been reached by other researchers in medicine, pediatrics, and health education. A notable example is provided by researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. After a three-year study of teenage pregnancy prevention, researcher Laurie Schwab Zabin disclosed these findings:

- Schools that combine sex education and counseling with after-school health and family planning services brought about a 30 percent decrease in the pregnancy rate.
- Further, students in the education/clinic program became sexually active seven months later than students attending schools without clinics.
- Those who delayed engaging in sex tended, more than other students, to obtain contraceptives before or soon after becoming sexually active.

Two health-clinic models

The comprehensive high school-based clinic in St. Paul, Minnesota. This project of the St. Paul-Ramsey Medical Center has clinics located in four high schools and one junior high. The clinics offer comprehensive health services ranging from immunizations and acne treatment,

Opponents to School-Based Clinics

Those who oppose comprehensive sex education and school-based health clinics often do so because they believe these:

- Rob parents of their rights to teach children their own beliefs and values about sexuality
- Violate traditional religious values with regard to sex
- Promote a breakdown in morality
- Encourage young people to engage in sex
- Promote abortions.

When seeking to establish programs to meet students' needs, it is important for school leaders to address as many concerns as possible.

When Considering Implementation . . .

When schools consider the feasibility of school-based health clinics, they inevitably confront three questions:

- What liablity does a school district assume for a clinic functioning either as an integral part of the system or as an independent agency?
- What confidentiality controls should the district place on student health information?
- What policy elements should guide a school district in its relations with parents of students receiving services at a clinic?

to counseling for eating disorders, tests for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and reproductive and family planning services.

The clinics do not dispense contraceptives, but offer referral forms for contraceptive supplies that may be filled at neighboring health clinics. The clinics have demonstrated success in reducing adolescent pregnancy rates and increasing school retention of pregnant teens. According to reliable sources, fertility rates among young girls have been reduced by as much as 55 percent.

The project also includes two self-developed curricula: "Values and Choices," for junior high students and their parents; and "Understanding Sexuality: Making Health Choices," a 15-lesson curriculum for high school students.

The education/clinic program in Baltimore — The Self Center. This program is directed by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in cooperation with the Baltimore public schools. During a two-year demonstration program, storefront clinics were operated near high schools and junior highs, according to the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc. The center staff provided in-school sex education, as well as individual and group counseling. Students could visit the clinics after school for a variety of comprehensive reproductive health services. After two years, the pregnancy rate in the schools with health clinics had dropped more than 30 percent. In two nearby schools that offered only in-school sex education classes, the pregnancy rate rose by more than 51 percent.

It is believed that the success of these clinics, and other clinics like them, is largely due to their emphasis on comprehensive education for heatlh, as well as on sexuality issues. Counseling and sex education are staples of these two model programs; but the programs go much farther. They provide a range of services through which school and health officials can detect poor nutrition, lack of good hygiene, academic deficiencies, social and family problems, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation for self-sufficiency.

Typically, more than half of the visits to a clinic are unrelated to birth control or pregnancies. In some cities, such as Dallas and Kansas City, these figures go up to two-thirds. Youngsters come to the clinics for help with emotional problems, obesity, abuse at home, and financial need.

Two special initiatives

Talk to troubled youth . . . and reach out to help them.

These are two parts of a formula used by dedicated women in the United States in their initiatives to help students at risk. In applying one part of the formula, communicating with your children, the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., (AJL) is working with the March of Dimes. In applying the second and larger part, the Junior Leagues have as a partner the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

Communicating with teens

Talking *with* and listening *to* teenagers about sexuality is no easy matter — a challenge not always met successfully by parents or, for that matter, by teachers or other school staff members. Recognizing this fact, Junior League officials decided it was necessary to sponsor parent seminars on adolescent sexuality. To ensure the success of the seminars, they saw that they first must train leaders. Starting in 1985, the AJL and the March of Dimes held regional training workshops to prepare league members to lead parent seminars in their own communities.

Goals of the seminars are to help adults understand adolescents' sexual feelings and to become comfortable in communicating with their children about the role of sex in young people's lives. "The seminars do not advocate a particular value position," says the Association of Junior Leagues.

Teen Outreach: Purposes and Methods

The twin purposes of the Teen Outreach Program are to reduce he incidence of teenage pregnancy and to increase the number of students who graduate from high school. The twin methodologies are to involve students in volunteer community service and to teach them life-management skills and life options.

Volunteer service. Students enrolled in Teen Outreach are expected to spend from two to two and one-half hours a week during the school year working in an assigned community agency. Junior League officials see volunteer service as "the cornerstone of the program," because it's through service that students "develop a sense of responsibility to the community; begin to see themselves as productive community members; and gain work experience." At times, volunteer work leads to paid jobs after students complete the Teen Outreach Program.

Study and discussion. The Teen Outreach curriculum is based on the philosophy that a student's improved self-esteem will bolster a desire to remain in school and discourage taking risks of becoming a parent too soon.

"They are designed to give adults skills in communicating their family values to their children." The association plans to continue sponsoring parent seminars as long as local chapters show an interest in them.

Reaching out to teens

The second initiative, that carried on by AJL and AASA, is a larger and more challenging undertaking. It began in 1978 when the Junior League of St. Louis initiated a teenage pregnancy prevention program, called the "Teen Outreach Program," in one of the city's high schools. Because of its success, Teen Outreach was introduced into additional St. Louis schools. Within 5 years, the program had spread, with foundation support, to more than 65 sites now involving more than 1,000 students in the United States and Canada.

The year-long program is open to all students and operates in both middle schools and high schools. Teens who are identified by their teachers as lacking motivation and self-esteem and those at high risk of failing in school, dropping out, or becoming pregnant are often attracted or referred to Teen Outreach.

An evaluation of the Teen Outreach Program that compared school suspensions, classroom failures, and pregnancies among teens in the program with similar groups of students in the same schools who were not enrolled in the Teen Outreach found "statistically significant" evidence that TOP teens are less likely to drop out of school, to become pregnant, or to give birth.

The TOP curriculum can be "institutionalized" into a regular school curriculum. When this happens, some 20 students of both sexes participate in weekly discussions led by a trained facilitator. The facilitator's major resources are 13 learning units — the first 9 focusing on such life-management skills as communication, decision making, and building self-esteem; the remaining units dealing with family life issues, human growth, and parenting. There also is a 400-page curriculum guide that encourages facilitators to use brainstorming, role playing, audiovisual aids, and local resource persons.

Facts About Clinics

Many sponsors. A third of existing clincs are sponsored by hospitals and medical centers; a quarter by departments of public health; a fifth by nonprofit community organizations; a sixth by community health agencies. School systems sponsor a very small proportion. Fewer still are sponsored by family planning agencies.

School-based and school-related. Three types of school-linked health clinics are in operation today:

- First are clinics that function as an integral part of the school system, under school board control, with clinic staff members reporting to school administrators.
- Second are clinics functioning under a contract between the school and another agency, such as a local health department.
- Third are clinics run by an outside agency, but located in or near a school — making them accessible to students.

States on the move. A Congressional committee found in 1986 that 15 states identified fully-functioning school-based clinics; seven other states were planning to start such clinics.

Sample policy. States that encourage school districts to create school-based health clinics often recommend guidelines such as those adopted in Connecticut and Maryland:

"School-based health clinics are a demonstrated means of providing comprehensive medical, educational, and counseling services. Services related to the prevention of pregnancies should constitute one phase of a total medical service for students. . . with goals to prevent adolescent pregnancies, reduce the number of second pregnancies, and improve the health of infant and mother."

Historic note. After the first comprehensive school-based health clinic in the United States opened in 1981 in Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul Minn., the dropout rate among teenage mothers there declined by 35 percent and birthrates fell by 56 percent.

Public support. A 1985 Louis Harris poll found that 67 percent of adults surveyed favored laws requiring public schools to establish ties with family-planning clinics so teenagers can learn about and obtain contraceptives.

Variety of practice. Less than half of the existing clinics serving students dispense contraceptives. The others write contraceptive prescriptions that students fill elsewhere.

Special programs, approaches

When confronting the stark facts of students who are pregnant, school administrators have these choices:

- **Keeping the pregnant student in regular classes — mainstreaming.** This approach carries few administrative burdens and little additional cost. In a survey conducted by the Education Research Group in Alexandria, Virginia, more than 80 percent of 716 administrators who responded to the question favored mainstreaming.
- **Providing alternative schools, classrooms, and programs for the pregnant student.** As is seen from the case studies in this report, and in the brief sketches below, alternative programs require facilities and the services of nurses, counselors, and teachers qualified to teach such topics as mixing baby-food formulas and diapering.
- **Setting up home-study or independent learning programs.** This approach is favored in small and rural school districts.

Here are some specific examples of how some school systems are meeting the special needs of pregnant and parenting teens.

Albuquerque, New Mexico. An alternative school, known as the New Futures School, offers pregnant adolescents academic classes required for graduation. Large doses of school work in parenting, child care, and child development are requisite ingredients. This school has been in operation since the 1970s. Close to 90 percent of the teenage parents graduate.

Leslie, Michigan. The board of education sponsors a Family Learning Center, housed in a mobile unit near the high school. The Center offers the courses needed for graduation, as well as training in parenting skills. In recent years, more than 90 percent of the senior parents have graduated; and some 97 percent of students from grades 7 through 11 have remained in school.

Ann Arbor, Michigan. Several of the schools in this district use peer education in an effort to reduce pregnancy. Students meet with fellow students (in private office space) and answer questions. The students also hand out leaflets, provided by the building administrator, that contain information about avoiding pregnancy and getting help once a student is pregnant. Student counselors are trained by Planned Parenthood and receive academic credit for their training. The Alan Gutmacher Institute in Washington, D.C. says those types of peer education efforts "appear to have a significant effect on the students who are trained as counselors," but is less sure about the effectiveness in reaching other teens.

Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland. School policy and regulations encourage teachers who know, or have reason to believe, that a student is pregnant to inform the principal, school nurse, or guidance counselors. In turn, the staff members begin to counsel the student about the available health, guidance, and supportive services. School officials also inform the pregnant student's parents, physician, and young father how the pregnant student can continue her education. Home instruction and independent study are offered to pregnant students who choose to work for a diploma.

Eatontown, New Jersey. This district operates the much-acclaimed Teenage Alternative Pregnancy Program (TAPP). Instruction takes place at a campus separate from the regular high school. The directors of TAPP say individual attention and individual and group counseling are the reasons for its success. Academic programs are given equal emphasis with instruction in pre- and postnatal care.

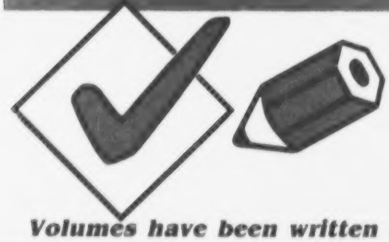
Fresno, California. First opposed as a "baby factory," Fresno's School-Age Parenting Program has gained public recognition as a verifiable means for making student parents "responsible and nurturing." The program's administrators have said: "We take the romanticism out of having a baby by exposing students to the full responsibilities of parenthood." Fresno provides elaborate and expensive services — child care facilities and registered nurses for the children's food and health needs.

Helpful AASA Resource

In 1988, the American Association of School Administrators and the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., collaborated to publish a booklet to help schools and communities address the problems of teen pregnancy. Called *Teenage Pregnancy: Developing Life Options*, the publication explores the scope of the problem nationally; how much it costs individuals, families, and society. It also spells out the impact education can have; and suggests what schools, families, and communites can do. Examples of successful programs are also featured.

The publication is available from AASA at bulk discount rates to make it easy to distribute throughout the school community.

Youth Issue: Drug and Alcohol Abuse



Volumes have been written on drug and alcohol use and abuse. When children and youth improperly use these substances, they put themselves at very high risk of foregoing their education. In fact, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, close to 80 percent of high school dropouts have drug-related problems.

Knowing that alcohol and drug abuse puts students at high risk, The American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of School Nurses, and the National Education Association in 1988 joined forces to publish *"Recommendations for School Districts Regarding Substance Abuse by Students."*

The associations felt strongly that districts should have clear-cut policies and guidelines on drug and alcohol abuse focused on a twofold purpose:

1. To create a drug-free environment.
2. To acknowledge that drug and alcohol dependence is an illness that requires treatment and assistance, not just punishment.

According to the recommendations, school policies and programs should address prevention, intervention, identification, referral, student assistance, disciplinary action, and information and training. Also, it is recommended that, in developing policies, school systems should involve school staff, parents, and community members before the policies are adopted by the school board. Experience has shown that, in order for drug prevention efforts to work, there must be a strong, unified, community-wide effort. Community leaders — people in government, business, education, and voluntary organizations, for example — need to be informed and involved; and their participation in establishing or reviewing related school district policy is a good place for them to start.

The problem

When developing policy and programs to prevent drug and alcohol abuse, schools and their communities will want to start with an assessment of the problem. Although some recent trends give cause for some hope, the United States still has the highest rate of youthful drug abuse of any industrialized country in the world. Recent studies show that:

- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana are the chemicals young people use most frequently, and each one is dangerous in its own way.
- Nearly two-thirds of all American youth (62 percent) use an illicit drug before they finish high school.
- About 1 in 20 high school seniors is drinking alcohol daily; and nearly 4 out of 10 (39 percent) have had five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks.
- Fully 40 percent of America's high school seniors have used an illicit drug other than marijuana.
- Even so, marijuana is by far the most widely used illicit drug, with 55 percent of high school seniors reporting some use in their lifetime; 40 percent reporting some use in the past year; and 1 out of every 4 reporting use in the past month.
- Of those seniors who were daily users of marijuana at some time, two-thirds began that pattern of use before the tenth grade.
- Almost one-half of all eventual users of illicit drugs began their use prior to the tenth grade.
- The average beginning age of alcohol drinking has dropped to 12.5.
- The average beginning age of marijuana use has dropped to 11.8.
- Every day, more than 5,000 Americans try cocaine for the first time. More than 1 out of every 4 people who are 18 to 24 years old have used cocaine.
- Nearly a third of all high school seniors surveyed had smoked cigarettes in the past month, a substantial portion of whom (19 percent) said they were daily smokers.

A local assessment of the extent of the drug and alcohol abuse problem can be made with the help of parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators, police and juvenile officials, local youth service agency staff, and students themselves. Needless to say, the loss of just one youth to the effects of drug or alcohol abuse is one too many.

Building understanding

In addressing youth drug abuse problems, schools and communities will also need to be knowledgeable about a few basic drug abuse facts. For example:

- Yes, alcohol is a drug. Alcohol is especially dangerous because it's so widely available and socially acceptable among adults. Many children just can't wait to start feeling "grown-up" by using it. There is tremendous pressure throughout the society to drink alcohol and, even though it's illegal for children, the message is getting through to them loud and clear. How many times every night do our children see a TV commercial for beer or wine in which the people are healthy, vigorous, successful, and having a good time surrounded by friends while they drink?
- Smoking one or more packs of cigarettes a day is judged by nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of today's high school seniors as having great risk of harm for the user. Nevertheless, what may be most important is that more than a third of these young people do not believe there is a great risk, despite all that is known today about the heatlh consequences of cigarette smoking.
- The marijuana generally consumed in the United States is at least 10 times stronger than it was in the late '60s and early '70s, when so many young people first began to smoke pot. This fact ought to alert us to a potential danger. Although we might have known something about drugs 10 years ago, our knowledge may be outdated at a time when we need to be able to tell our students the facts.
- THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, is stored in the fatty tissues and organs and can stay in the body for up to a month. Thus, any person smoking marijuana once a week is actually building up an accumulation of THC that can have harmful effects on the body long after the person has smoked marijuana.
- Although doctors and researchers aren't sure of all the health effects of marijuana, there is growing evidence that marijuana can be extremely harmful, contrary to what people once thought. It can have serious negative effects on the immune system, the respiratory system, the reproductive organs, and all other important body functions.
- During adolescence, a child should be developing important coping skills for dealing with anger, stress, disappointment, loneliness, and other feelings and challenges. These skills cannot be learned when young people attempt to "solve problems by using chemicals. A child learns to deal with stress by dealing with it, not masking it with alcohol or other drugs. Stress, loneliness, anger, and disappointment are human conditions. How a young person learns to deal with them is an important part of what growth and development are all about.

Designing adequate programs

It has been shown that most of the approaches to dealing with drug and alcohol problems over the past two decades have had only a short-term impact. As reported in *Positive Prevention: Successful Approaches to Preventing Youthful Drug and Alcohol Use*, a joint publication of AASA and The Quest National Center, "Although our intentions have been good, we need to give our youth more than reliable information about alcohol and other drugs; more than dynamic assemblies and lectures on drugs by visiting experts; more than a five-day unit on drugs; more than an essay or poster contest."

All of these approaches can be important parts of a larger effort. But by themselves, they are not enough to have long-term results. Because the problem of youthful drug use is complex, it cannot be stamped out through overly simplistic or punitive methods. It requires a comprehensive plan that focuses on *prevention* — and, more specifically, on *positive prevention*, as the title of the AASA/Quest booklet suggests. Simply put: The best way to deal with the drug and alcohol problem is to stop it before it starts. And the best way to do this is through the efforts and commitment of a variety of people.

Underlying principles of positive prevention

The three principals that underlie most successful community efforts are these:

Principle One

The importance of helping young people learn skills in:

- Saying "no" to drugs
- Developing healthy alternatives to drug use
- Developing character
- Making wise decisions
- Thinking critically
- Solving problems
- Developing effective relationships
- Communicating effectively.

Principle Two

The importance of encouraging young people to adopt a drug-free lifestyle. Research and experience show that use of alcohol and other drugs erodes self-esteem and impairs ability to make good decisions.

Principle Three

The importance of an identified peer group that promotes and practices drug-free living.

The importance of the involvement of youth themselves in drug abuse prevention efforts cannot be overstressed. They have proven time and again that they are not just part of the problem, but can be part of the solution. With support and leadership from teachers and other adults, young people can become involved in such efforts as:

- Kids helping kids through youth peer programs that bring young people together to reinforce positive behavior and provide mutual support.
- Community service programs that enable young people to become meaningfully involved in their communities and thus much less likely to turn to self-destructive behavior.
- Activities that encourage them to say "no" to drugs and support each other in a drug-free lifestyle. When self-esteem is high, drug and alcohol abuse are less likely.

Let's look now at two national programs that have been successful in helping districts deal with teenage drug and alcohol abuse. There's also an example of one district's experience developing programs and support to address the problem of drug and alcohol use by its students.

Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence Program

Removing risks and replacing them with skills

Through a unique partnership between the world's largest service organization, Lions Clubs International, and a non-profit educational organization, Quest International, the Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence Program has already had a positive impact on young people in more than 10,000 schools in the United States and Canada, 700 schools in England, and others in many countries. The American Association of School Administrators has, in conjunction with these two organizations, sponsored more than 140 institutes on early adolescence in the past few years.

The heart of the Skills for Adolescence Program, aimed at the young adolescents age 10 to 14, grades 6 through 8, is promotion of positive attitudes, values, and behaviors while stressing specific life skills and community service. Lions-Quest has shown that these things offer the best prevention against adolescent fallbacks on drugs, alcohol, or negative behavior during this confusing period of physical and emotional growth.

The program can be offered independently or taught within existing classroom courses, including language arts, social studies, and health classes. It can be taught in 18 weeks or take several years. The units, 45 minutes in length, are:

- Entering the Teen Years: The Challenge Ahead
- Building Self-Confidence Through Better Communication
- Learning About Emotions: Developing Competence in Self-Assessment and Self-Discipline
- Friends: Improving Peer Relationships
- Strengthening Family Relationships
- Developing Critical-Thinking Skills for Decision Making
- Setting Goals for Health Living
- Summing Up.

Self-discipline, responsibility, good judgment, and the ability to get along well with others are

Positive Prevention in Schools

Schools didn't create the drug and alcohol problem among youth, but they know they must help solve it through such things as these:

- **Clearly established policies, including those that communicate positive expectations of student behavior and staff responsibilities.**
- **A recognition that drug policies are not tools of punishment but, rather, instruments of instruction. One of their main purposes is to guide students toward a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.**
- **A strong, ongoing commitment to positive prevention by the school board and administration; and a communicated belief that short-term, "quick-fix" approaches are not enough.**
- **Effective programs that provide accurate information about drugs and alcohol; teach skills in resisting negative peer pressure, decision making, and communication; and build self-esteem.**

Active, continuing inservice training for all teachers and staff in effective alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

Ongoing assistance to parents in understanding and dealing with the problem.

major underscored values. The Lions-Quest program becomes part of the young adolescent's daily life, thorugh homework projects with the family, writing assignments, opportunities to work in the school, and community service projects. Helping the elderly or tutoring younger students gives young adolescents an understanding that people their age can make a difference. They are important and needed.

More than 100 experienced educators, researchers, and writers helped to design the Skills for Adolescence Program, and a number of major educational and professional organizations are cooperating in the program, including AASA; the Just Say "No" Foundation; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth; National Middle School Association; National PTA; and the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

Quest International master trainers offer an intensive three-day workshop to all teachers and group leaders choosing to offer the program. The training is required, and the program provides continuing support for teachers and group leaders through membership in Lions-Quest. The teacher selection process takes place in the school, based on some very specific criteria.

According to Lions-Quest, "The Skills for Adolescence Program is comprehensive in scope because it links parents, the school, and the community in an effort to improve the well-being of young people now and in the years ahead. The goals of the program are to have students develop positive social behaviors and attitudes; establish ties to stable elements in society; learn essential skills; and make a commitment to lead healthy, drug-free lives."

For information: The Lions-Quest Program, 537 Jones Road, P.O. Box 566, Granville, OH 43023-0566.

Project DARE: A hands-on program

Project DARE is an innovative program designed to prevent substance abuse through education. Begun in 1983 in Los Angeles, California, the program has been adopted in school systems in 34 states throughout the nation, and in Germany, England, and Japan.

DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) uses a curriculum model developed by education specialists that focuses on providing accurate information about alcohol and drugs; teaching decision-making skills; building self-esteem; providing ways to resist negative peer pressure; and offering alternatives to drug use for elementary school students. It is taught by highly trained uniformed law enforcement officers from the state police force who are assigned full-time to classroom duty. Called a "hands-on" program, the officers come to one school building for 17 consecutive weeks to present a lesson for fifth graders.

In the classroom there is constant interaction between the students and the instructor, which reinforces the above-stated goals. With the classroom teacher present during these lessons, the overall goals continue to be pursued after the police officer is gone. The students are encouraged to participate in group activities and decision-making strategies, and are constantly reminded of ways of dealing with peer pressure.

Project DARE can be coordinated on a limited level or statewide. A local police department can work with one school or all schools in a district. Or the state police department can work, as is done in Michigan, with a statewide advisory board representing youth service agencies.

For information: Sergeant Joseph Hanley, State Coordinator, Project DARE, 714 South Harrison Road, East Lansing, MI 48823; 517/332-2521, ext. 579.

An Alliance of Volunteers Battles Abuse

Strongsville, Ohio
(Enrollment: 6,007; K-12)

"Alcohol is okay, drugs are bad. . . . What's wrong with a little joint now and then?. . . . We don't have a drug problem in our community. . . ."

These statements reflected widespread public attitudes in Strongsville, Ohio — attitudes that educators had to combat as they sought preventive measures against student drinking and alcohol abuse.

Local public views seemed to ignore facts — at least as the views existed in 1986. In a presentation to the board of education in October of that year, John F. Cassily, in charge of Strongsville's pupil personnel services, argued that student alcohol and drug abuse problems existed, not somewhere far away, but in Strongsville's own back yard. He pointed to statewide and county statistics that showed:

- 4 out of 5 Ohio secondary students had tried drugs.
- 70 percent of students in grades 7 through 12 had used drugs at one time or another.
- The average age of first use for boys was 11.9 years; for girls, 12.7 years.
- Alcohol was used by 60 percent of seventh graders.
- 87 percent of high school seniors drank alcoholic beverages; 41 percent consumed them regularly.

Cassily went on to say that parents, in many instances, either supported or were indifferent to teenage alcohol consumption; that one county school served as a distribution point for drugs; and that fast food restaurants and parking lots were used for drug transactions.

"Is there a drug and alcohol problem in Stongsville?" asked Cassily. "Look at the whiskey and beer bottles left on street corners each weekend. Ask the fast food restaurants how many garbage bags of bottles they clean out of their parking lots each week. . . ."

Impressed with the facts and arguments, the board of education approved Project CARE (Chemical Abuse Reduced by Education). The city government later joined in the effort by naming and paying for a half-time community task force coordinator.

"Project CARE is a volunteers' program," Cassily said. "School staff members volunteer their time. Community groups and private citizens also contribute their resources without cost.

Cassily has spelled out five goals for the program:

- To heighten community awareness of the local drug/alcohol problem.
- To stimulate discussion and action.
- To reinforce student decisions against drug/alcohol abuse.
- To develop an identification and referral system for suspected abusers.
- To develop a support system for staff, students, and parents who must cope with dependency or dependency issues.

Project CARE has its origin in a "Statement of Concern about Drugs and Alcohol" issued by the Greater Cleveland School Superintendents Association in November 1979. Since then, programs have been adopted in 137 school districts in 15 counties for which Cleveland is the hub.

The volunteers responsible for carrying out Project CARE within the Strongsville schools include 84 administrators, teachers, and parents who are organized into teams at district levels, secondary and elementary levels, and within each school building. They develop programs of prevention, intervention, and support and sponsor activities

New for Elementary Students

Based on the impressive track record of the Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence program, the Lions Club and Quest have collaborated with the National Association of Elementary School Principals to create a sister program to provide children in grades K-5 with the fundamental skills they will need for healthy growth and successful living.

Called Skills for Growing, the program curriculum was successfully piloted in 1987 by more than 100 teachers in 10 geographically diverse schools, and was being demonstrated in 1988-89 in 41 schools in Canada and the United States in preparation for full-scale dissemination of the program in the fall of 1989.

The basic goals of the program are to help these young citizens master effective thinkiing skills that lead to posiitive behaviors — especially the ability to say "no" to drug and alcohol use — and a sense of belonging to the world around them. The six-unit, year-long curriculum focuses on 10 goals, including establishing a healthy learning environment; providing skill instruction; encouraging a drug-free lifestyle; providing opportunities for practicing good citizenship through service to others; providing support for teachers and administrators by providing quality training, outstanding materials, and ongoing follow-up; promoting a positive school climate; involving parents as partners; encouraging community involvement; promoting positive peer groups; and celebrating and respecting the diversity of people.

"Our rationale for reaching children at such a young age is based on solid research," explained Quest Chairman Rick Little. "It's been shown that as early as third grade the school performance of some students begins a steady decline. Our hope is that Lions-Quest Skills for Growing will, from the outset, help children develop the self-esteem, learning skills, and positive attitudes that will make them personally as well as academically successful."

as varied as KISS groups (Kids in Stressful Situations); Teenage Institute (self-help, self-growth); Aftercare Support groups; and "Just Say No" sessions for students grades 4 through 6. Topics and concerns discussed by students in these groups may include nutrition, physical strength, personal feelings about families and peers, what's right, and what's wrong.

"It doesn't matter if you are a young business person or a community volunteer, a senior citizen or a student, a parent or a single adult — teenage chemical abuse effects everyone," Cassily wrote in an appeal a few months before the city hired its coordinator. "Let's form an alliance for a chemical-free lifestyle for our youth."

Immediate goals for further development of Project CARE in the Strongsville schools include expanding services and staff, providing released time for staff who facilitate student group guidance, establishing an Ala-teen program, and promoting awareness training for board members and administrators.

Note: The United States District Attorney's Office for the Northern Ohio Region and the Association of Mayors and City Managers for Cuyahoga County, Ohio, have recommeded use of the Strongsville model throughout Ohio. A free video tape on the model and consultant assistance in setting it up are available.

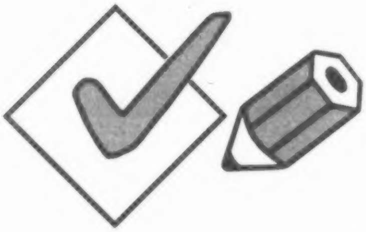
For information: John F. Cassily, Coordinator, Project CARE, Strongsville City Schools, 13200 Pearl Road, Strongsville, OH 44136. Telephone: 216/238-2650.

Collaborating for Prevention

The following organizations have taken a leadership role in drug and alcohol abuse prevention by joining together to form the National Coalition for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse:

- **American Association of School Administrators**
- **Association of Junior Leagues, Inc.**
- **Lions Clubs International**
- **National PTA**
- **National 4-H Council**
- **Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation**
- **The Quest National Center**

Youth Issue: Teenage Suicide



"Suicidal persons have a damp, dismal November in their souls," says Millie Caspersen of the Hennepin County, Minnesota, Crisis Center.

That unhappy condition grips thousands upon thousands of children and youth in the United States, leading them to attempt and — in many instances — to commit suicide.

Just how many children are affected? What patterns exist? How can and how are districts and communities dealing with the issue of teenage suicide? These questions and more are addressed briefly here.

Facts, myths, and beliefs

Suicide patterns among students show increasing numbers of incidents involving all ages, the affluent and the poor, those with high self-esteem, and those with low self-images.

Accurate statistics on suicide among youth go back less than three decades. Within this period, suicide among children ages 5 to 14 rose 100 percent, from 3 per 100,000 to 6 per 100,000. For young people ages 15 to 24, suicides have more than doubled, making this the third leading cause of death among this age group. Suicides among white students still dominate the patterns, but recent studies show a steady increase of suicidal deaths among nonwhites. "Black students are no longer immune," says one expert. Among native American adolescents, there has been a tenfold increase in suicide since 1963, and the number of suicide attempts has increased 1,000 percent. Suicide facts about Hispanics are only now becoming available, but even preliminary data show cause for concern.

Erroneous assumptions

Old assumptions about youth suicide no longer hold. One assumption was based on the premise that youth suicide was an urban phenomenon. Results of studies by Ralph Rickgarn, University of Minnesota, show rural youth to be at as high a risk of suicide as city dwellers. Another assumption — that suicide is "mostly for males" — is also losing its validity. Suicidal rates among girls are moving upward. Girls are using the more lethal weapon — guns — once largely used by young men. And this fact is indisputable: Young females *attempt* suicide at a rate three to four times that of males.

Rickgarn reminds us that available statistics are sketchy and do not tell the whole story. "There are many suicides that are disguised, which are not certified for fear of stigmatizing families or loss of insurance. And then there are the self-destructive behaviors not described as suicides, such as one-car accidents, obesity, alcoholism and drugs, where individuals have a clear intent of ending their lives."

Underlying beliefs

Districts that have developed successful mechanisms and procedures to cope with student suicides are guided by these underlying beliefs:

- Youth suicide is a family and community problem in which the schools share responsibility. Therefore parents, community agencies, and the schools must work together for prevention and intervention.
- Prevention efforts should use existing services, rather than set up costly new ones. Nearly a score of state education agencies emphasize to local districts that many prevention and intervention resources already exist in each community. In addition to school resources, schools can use county and town social services, crisis hotlines, private agencies, mental health associations, hospitals, and other health care institutions, parent-teacher organizations, and volunteer groups.
- Youth suicide is seldom a sudden occurrence. Its origins may lie in a student's early years and erupt into problems in late adolescence. "Suicide develops as a continuum of behavior," says William A. Berkan, a social services specialist in the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction. He and his colleagues in the state agency hold the view that youth suicide is the end result of problems that produce feelings of depression, hopelessness, and helplessness; leading finally to a choice of life or death. That is why it is important, the experts say, for the schools and the community to have a coordinated *youth issues* plan. Such coordinated action should help reduce the youth suicide rate.

Bulwarks against youth suicide

Along with understanding the youth suicide problem, schools take two major approaches — prevention and intervention. Unhappily, there is a third approach needed at times, which suicidologists call postvention — that is, dealing with the aftermath of suicide. Included in the prevention/intervention approaches is this imperative:

Be sure your district has clearly defined procedures and standby machinery to give direction, support, and services necessary to resolve problems relating to student suicide.

Example 1:

Boston public school authorities rely on the School Support Team (SST) to prevent suicide or to intervene in crisis situations. Such a team exists in each Boston elementary, middle, and high school. Team members are concerned not only with potentially suicidal students, but with any student who may need support services and what Boston officials call "proactive preventive interventions to address individual student problems."

The team consists of the principal, school psychologist, pupil adjustment counselors, school nurse, teachers, and special educators. The principal sees to it that the team meets on a regular basis and that each member is present and ready to act on cases referred to the team.

Referrals may come from any teacher, team member, or parent of a student. (A student may refer his or her own case to the SST.) Referrals are addressed to the principal on an official form on which the problem is briefly described and a request made that the case be included on an SST meeting agenda. After consideration, the SST prepares a written action plan, which may include any of the following:

- Counseling
- Family outreach
- Modification of the student's academic program
- Referral of the student to specialized community agencies and services.

Following the development of policies and procedures on suicide, the Boston Public Schools published a staff manual incorporating highlights of the district's approach to the problem. Additional useful items in the manual are a bibliography on suicide and a section listing agencies and services in the community's support network.

Example 2:

In the Minneapolis public schools, the clear, certain call to all staff members is this: Build a support network around the suicidal student as soon as possible.

At hand in building the support network are the districtwide Crisis Team, the Hennepin County services for suicide prevention and intervention, and each building's Support Team. These mechanisms can be activated by the concerned administrator, teacher, counselor, social worker, nurse, school psychologist, parent, or friend of the suicidal student. The suicide guidelines, developed by the Minneapolis Special Education Department and distributed and discussed with staff, spell out in detail the procedures to follow with a student gives even the slightest signs of taking his or her life.

The guidelines remind all staff members to take seriously any student's idle remarks and threats about suicide. Such remarks are among a dozen or more serious warning signals that may come from a student who is suicide-prone. Any signal, or combination of signals, Minneapolis guidelines stress, should be the starting point for surrounding the student with a "Protective network safeguarding the student's life."

Begin with an interview.

Protection efforts in Minneapolis schools often begin with a crisis interview with the student, followed immediately by consideration of the student's case at the first possible meeting of the building's student Support Team. Alerts may be flashed to teachers, counselors, nurses, and others who have any contacts with the student.

Of first importance to Minneapolis school officials is notification to parents. According to the guidelines:

- When informing the parents about the student's suicidal warning signs, the school's representative should share the full details about the student's suicidal behavior and conversation, including the name(s) of staff who witnessed the behavior or conversation.
- When possible, face-to-face contact with parents is the preferred method in the sharing of concern about suicide, particularly when a student appears seriously at risk.
- The staff person making the call to the parent should be knowledgeable about community resources the parents might use in getting immediate mental intervention for the student.

The guidelines further note that callers may find distraught or emotionally unstable parents, or parents who do not wish to seek help for the at-risk student when contacted. "Parental resistance and denial is a common and unfortunate dynamic of child and adolescent suicidal behavior," the document states. "In such instances, the school staff should immediately seek consultation via the districtwide Crisis Team.

Example 3:

In *Quakertown, Pennsylvania*, the standby mechanism is the Student Assistance Team, which is concerned not only with student suicide, but with students at risk from drugs, alcohol, severe family crises, depression, and severe school problems. In one year (1985-1986), the Student Assistance Team dealt with 20 suicide threats, compared with the same number of cases involving drugs and alcohol, and 32 cases of family crisis.

The Quakertown school district has worked out detailed procedures and guidelines for the operation of the Student Assistance Team. Team leadership is rotated monthly or bimonthly, as decided by the group. Guidelines stipulate that each decision about a student must be a group decision. "No one person's opinion can carry more weight than that of any other person. All 'hats' are to be left outside the meeting room door." And these other Quakertown guideline items are worth noting:

- Student Assistance Team members shall treat all students with dignity, respect, and compassion.
- Team members shall understand the warning signals of distress and will be knowledgeable of the in-school and out-of-school resources available for help.
- Maintaining confidentiality is as important to the group as it is to the child and family. Team members shall not discuss cases in the presence of others."

Part of Quakertown's success in mobilizing its school resources against suicide is due to the production of multiple informational materials for teachers and administrators. Among items available are:

- A board resolution on student suicide
- Detailed descriptions of how the district's Student Assistance Team operates for suicidal and other at-risk students.

Example 4:

Smaller school districts adopt simple, flexible procedures. For example, in place at the secondary level in *Park Ridge, New Jersey*, is this procedure followed by staff members who suspect that a student is at risk for suicide:

Step 1. Inform an administrator.
Step 2. The administrator will summons a member of the school's core team.
Step 3. The core team will:
  - Interview the student
  - Inform and summons the parent(s)/guardian(s) to the school
  - Consult with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and help arrange appropriate intervention
  - Remain with the pupil until parent(s)/guardian(s) or medical personnel take charge.

A core team in Park Ridge includes an administrator, a nurse, counselors, and personnel from a Child Study Team.

Cherry Creek Schools, Englewood, Colorado. This district uses a rich collection of materials for inservice education of teachers and for student instruction. Some of the items were developed in the district as far back as 1981; others have been brought together more recently from sources outside the district. Examples include:

1. Several questionnaires on suicide designed so that students and teachers work out answers together.
2. "Stay' Alive," a pamphlet produced by the Mental Health Association of Colorado, 1391 Speer Blvd., Denver, CO 80204.
3. A Suicide Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents, organized in five lessons "to help students become aware of their attitudes about suicide and be able to identify students who are at risk of suicide." Each lesson contains background information for the teacher. This resource was developed in 1984 by the Suicide and Crisis Center, 2910 Swiss Avenue, Dallas, TX 75204.

Other examples:

Here is a sampling of other districts that have developed policies, programs, and materials to combat teenage suicide.

Fairfax County, Virginia. Because their student suicide prevention program received wide acclaim, district officials decided to publish an account of how to set up such a program and how to make the staff full partners in its conduct. The publication contains formats for inservice workshops and suggestions for audiovisual resources. For details and price of the publication, write Fairfax County Public Schools, 10310 Layton Hall Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.

Fairfield, Connecticut. This district is joining with neighboring Bridgeport, Monroe, Stratford, and Trumbull to develop a regional effort for suicide prevention. Superintendent Larry W. Dougherty said: "Fairfield has had guidelines for identifying suicidal students for more than two years; and I know the other school districts have also done much work on this problem. But in a regional effort, we can all profit from one another's experiences."

Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Three suicides and a dozen suicide attempts within 12 months spurred this district to set up a crisis team in each of its schools composed of several or all of the following: the principal, a teacher, a school social worker, a psychologist, a counselor, and a school nurse. Detailed preventive procedures were developed. "And we put out the word to students that suicide is a theft of life and *not* a courageous action," says Claire Hunt, the district's director of special education.

La Crosse, Wisconsin. Believing it is prudent to use existing school mechanisms rather than to create new ones, this district expanded use of its student assistance program for helping suicidal students. In addition, the board approved a Contemporary Problems Seminar "to develop an awareness of personal responsibility in participating students." Students are enrolled by staff or parental referral. Maximum class size is 15 students per instructor.

Mounds View, St. Paul, Minnesota. This district's procedures cover what to do when a student threatens suicide during regular school hours and what to do when a student calls a staff member after school.

Souderton Public Schools, Pennsylvania. Procedures in this district stress the steps for school staff to respond to a student suicide threat. Among recommended actions:

- Ask direct questions about the events that triggered the crisis.
- Stay with the student until the inital crisis is past.
- Encourage the student to seek help.

Provide inservice programs

Evidence from the AASA survey for this report shows that suicide prevention and intervention often appear as items on the general inservice and orientation activities during the fall of the year.

Some districts offer additional sessions for newly assigned staff members.

In large systems, the building adminstrator is responsible for the inservice activities. Sessions cover facts, skills, and procedural steps. Presenters include school staff members — psychologists, counselors, nurses — and specialists and consultants on youth suicide.

A sampling of materials for inservice programs conducted in districts of all sizes show a number of staples:

Informational sessions cover:

- Facts and myths about teenage suicide.
- Local, state, and national trends of youth suicide.
- Warning signals of suicidal behavior.
- Underlying problems that move students to risk suicide.
- Precipitating events that lead to suicide or suicide attempts.
- The role of school staff specialists in suicide prevention and intervention.
- Role of student/support assistance teams and other crisis intervention mechanisms.
- Out-of-school resources available in the district for students having suicidal potential.

Skill sessions cover:

- How to assess suicidal potentials in young people and identify high-risk students.
- How to take the first steps in suicide intervention.
- How to talk and listen to students exhibiting suicidal behavior.
- How to conduct individual and group counseling for students having suicidal potential.

Sessions on procedural steps cover:

- Referring students to the building's student support team.
- Referring students to community agencies and services.
- Enlisting cooperation of parents.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Keeping records and documentation.
- Implementing procedures after a student has committed suicide.

Compile and disseminate lists of community resources to help the suicidal student.

Local, county, and state agencies — both public and private — are available for help in suicide crises in all parts of the United States. Many have hot lines or crisis telephone services. Some may charge a fee. Some are walk-in facilities.

Among the local agencies on the list a school might maintain — complete with address, telephone number, and additional information — might be the following:

- Crisis intervention centers.
- Suicide prevention centers.
- Walk-in counseling centers.
- Mental health centers.
- Counseling centers.
- Outreach programs.
- Hospitals.
- Child guidance centers.
- Family health programs.
- Youth emergency services.

When youth take their lives

If — despite staff and school intervention efforts — a student commits suicide, the school must be ready to respond with appropriate actions. Even as the educational community joins in expressions of grief and sympathy, school officials may well declare formally that:

- The school has lost one of its members
- The suicide was the act of a distraught person who was beyond the help of school and family
- Neither teachers nor administrators view suicide as a noble or brave action.

Responding to the concerns of the community, staff members, and students is the immediate responsibility of the district administrators. And a first step to help reduce the anxieties that are generated by a student's death is to compile the facts about the event, listing and describing only those occurrences that relate to the school, the teachers, and the intervention and prevention efforts. This means that information about family,

The Strongest Bulwark

Among the best preventive measures for student suicide are those that exist in the classroom. Where there is a learning environment that supports and increases a student's sense of self-worth and self-control, the tendency toward self-destruction is greatly minimized. Add to such a learning environment the use of guest speakers, informal class discussions, peer counseling, and the showing of films on suicide prevention, and you further decrease the probable incidence of suicide and suicide attempts.

— Based on views expressed by school administrators and specialists on student suicide

medical history, or facts designated as confidential by parents or school should not come from the schools.

Below are three sets of suggestions coming from various school districts that have had to face the aftermath of student suicide.

1. **Appoint spokespeople.**
   - Designate a person who will respond to inquiries from the community (church, civic, or municipal officials) in accordance with the facts and guidelines prepared by the administration.
   - Designate a person who will respond to inquiries from the press. Only persons of highest responsibility should talk to the press: the superintendent, district communication officer, principal, or school psychologist. Again, information for reporters and other media representatives should be limited to the school's intervention and prevention efforts, with due regard to confidentiality.
2. **Talk with the staff**
   - Be sure all teachers and other staff members know the facts about the incident (rather than permitting rumors or conjectures to take hold). Explain the school's position on the type of information that may be released and who will respond to inquiries.
   - Be ready to provide individual counseling or support for teachers distraught by the suicide.
   - Provide the services of experts to meet with teachers and staff members to reduce anxiety and stress.
3. **Watch — and work with — students**
   - Provide for individual counseling for those students who request it or have been identified by staff members as being vulnerable to suicide.
   - Decide with competent experts whether special assemblies should be scheduled. Some psychologists believe that calling large assemblies to discuss the suicide is best avoided. On the other hand, assemblies can profitably be used to tell students of school and community measures available to help them with their special problems, stress, and anxieties.
   - Discourage actions on the part of students that will dramatize or glorify the suicide. In memoriam, gestures such as planting a tree, writing a poem, or donating blood to the Red Cross might be appropriate.
   - Funeral services are the responsibility of the family, with the school officially in a minor role.

Confronting a Student Suicidal Crisis

What should school staff members do and not do when working with a student who is at high-risk of suicide? The answers below were selected from staff manuals, guidelines, and procedures developed by a dozen or more school districts, including those of Boston; Cherry Creek, Colorado; Minneapolis; and Quakertown, Pennsylvania.

✓ If you take control of a suicidal crisis, stay calm. . . . Anxiety is contagious; keep your composure. . . . Do not allow yourself to get caught up in the uproar. . . .

✓ You may need support and comfort yourself — ask for them. . . . Do not try to solve the suicidal crisis alone. . . . Get help from colleagues.

✓ Do not leave the student alone during the height of the crisis. . . . Provide comfort, companionship, a caring attitude. . . . Do not allow the student to go home alone. . . . If necessary, find indivduals to escort the student to a hospital, mental health clinic, or a psychologist.

✓ Offer help and confirmation to the student that the cirsis will end well. . . . Tell the student it's okay to be intensely emotional. . . . Be a sponge and take in all you can — keep still and listen. . . . When the occasion calls for it, don't be afraid to mention the words "suicide" or "killing yourself. . . ."

✓ During an interview, after the emotional storm has passed, focus on what happened to trigger the blow-up — look for the precipitating event. . . . Stress what the student has been doing well. . . . Show interest in what the student can do for himself or herself. . . . If the student is ready to listen, open up options, possible courses of action, decisions to make. . . . Start developing a contract with the student regarding next steps. . . . Suggest immediate actions on the part of the student. . . . Get the student to agree, "I promise I will not try to kill myself, but will try to get help from people who care about me."

✓ Do not promise secrecy to the student. . . . Suicide thrives on secrecy. . . . Tell the student directly that you have to tell others about the suicidal incident. . . . Offer such statements as, "We need to have your family know about this." . . . "I must tell the doctor what happened." . . . Show the student there is a network of support ready to help.

It Happened in Cedarburg — A Case Study

During the lunch hour on a memorable day in 1984, a sophomore boy left the Cedarburg, Wisconsin, high school gounds and shot himself to death in his home.

Even in the midst of community grief (Cedarburg is a closely knit town of about 10,000 people), some remembered — with hindsight — that the boy had given many of the classic warning signs of his suicide. But no one came forward to help.

Principal and faculty of the high school resolved there must be no repetition of such an occurrence. The result was a community effort culminating in a committee to address adolescent suicide and depression. Police, clergy, mental health agencies, and the local news media worked with school staff members to launch a suicide prevention program that has been cited as exemplary even beyond the Wisconsin borders.

As a first step, Cedarburg adopted the principle that the key to prevention is the identification of potentially suicidal students. Bulletin-board notices and other informational devices informed students and teachers that the committee on teenage depression and suicide was preparing to help students facing emotional crisis. "Help is available," the notices said in effect. "Tell us about any individual who might need it."

Simultaneously, the committee launched the following prevention efforts:

Inservice sessions — large groups. These sessions were conducted by the school social workers and psychologist, with the help of resource people from the community. A major aim of these activites was to help all school employees — professional and nonprofessional — understand the warning signs that identify students at risk of depression and suicide.

Inservice sessions — small groups. At these activities, limited to not more than 10 participants, leaders described the referral system between school and the community treatment agencies; elaborated in depth on the signs and symptoms of depression and mental disturbance; and examined the suicidal patterns of young people.

More inservice. Large and small group sessions similar to those provided for faculty and administrators were also held for teacher aides, library personnel, secretaries, and others who have contact with students.

Sessions for parents. Cedarburg's committee believes that parent education on youth suicide is vital in prevention. The committee wanted parents to know that the school is able to respond to these students in a positive way. Evening orientations for parents brought out large audiences. Lectures, followed by small group question-and-answer sessions, provided the usual format. A hand-out brochure, prepared especially for parents, dealth with how to help the suicidal individual. Other reading materials distributed to parents covered myths and facts about suicide, how to talk with a suicidal person, and an extensive list of warning signs.

Student involvement. The role of students in suicide prevention can hardly be overemphasized, Cedarburg's committee believes. There is research evidence that suicidal students first seek assistance from their friends (rather than from parents or professionals). Similarly, evidence from research also shows that peers can often change the course of adolescents bound for self-destruction.

But Cedarburg's committee left nothing to chance. It set up student workshops on suicide and depression, stressing that suicide is preventable and that a knowledge of warning signs can go far in keeping their friends from death.

Prior to the workshops, homeroom teachers asked all students to write open-ended questions about suicide and stressed the importance and seriousness of their participation in the preventive efforts. The workshops were usually opened with a film, which was followed by talks from the director of the mental health center and school staff members. Students were given take-home pamphlets that summarized myths and facts, warning signs, and what to do and what not to do when seeking to help a suicidal friend.

Pulling It All Together: Useful Approaches and Tools

As we have seen, the ways that lead toward dropout prevention are many and varied and no single way is best. State educational agencies that have developed advanced plans for dropout prevention recommend a combination of approaches — as do educators who have given thought to the problem. Consequently, local boards of education and their administrators are testing many-faceted initiatives.

To help pull together all of the information provided in this Critical Issues Report, it may be useful to examine in more detail four major approaches to dealing with the problem of at-risk students. In their publication, *Staying In — A Dropout Handbook*, J. Novak and G. Doherty have led the way by categorizing "the ways to go" to prevent students at risk from leaving school. In this section, we have modified their framework and followed another lead from the Florida state education agency in its manuals on comprehensive dropout prevention plans.

The four major approaches are:
- Alternative curriculum
- Counseling
- Tutorial
- Work-related business partnerships.

The following discussion and accompanying worksheets should help school systems and their communities organize their thoughts as they build and improve a holistic approach tailored to meet the needs of their at-risk youth.

Alternative Curriculum Approaches

There is hardly a school district in the United States now without an alterantive school, alternative curriculum, alternative course, or alternative classroom designed to answer unqiue needs of students. Concern for the at-risk student has greatly increased the number of alternative approaches. Educators have great faith in them. In interviews, administrators have called alternatives the mainstay of dropout prevention efforts. They have also labeled them "safety nets for high-risk students" and "pillars of the dropout prevention structure."

The alternative approach is tried and tested. Some trace its formal beginnings to 1938 and the start of the Bronx High School for Science; others, to 1964 and the metropolitan Youth Education Center in Denver. The Parkway Plan of Philadelphia, started in 1969, popularized the optional school as a valuable addition to conventional schools.

By 1970, districts were rapidly developing alternative programs to complement conventional schools. These efforts have been endorsed by national commissions and their reports up to the present time. As early as 1973, the report of the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education stated: "Each school district should provide a broad range of alternative schools and programs so that every student will have a meaningful educational option available. . . ."

Recommendations of this type acquired new meaning and urgency when educators recognized that our public schools were bypassing, neglecting, or shortchanging up to a third of the school population — students who can not or will not adjust to the conventional school. The variety and intensity of alternative approaches increased. Today, school districts have numerous models to choose from.

In the chart below, we list eight major alternative approaches. Check appropriate items in the columns to indicate which of these alternative models are either practical or doable for your district, which may need improvement, and which are being planned for future implementation.

Alternative models

	For our district, this is practical and doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation
Magnet schools. This type of school serves the gifted, the average — and it can also serve with distinction the potential dropout. Simply because the magnet school is an alternative to the traditional school, it often serves to hold and challenge potential dropouts.			
Fundamental schools: These are highly structured schools which emphasize mastery of basic subjects, strict discipline, respect for authority and, in some in cases, patriotism.			
Street academies. These may be located in store fronts and other nontraditional facilities within a neighborhood. The stark difference in learning environment often has attraction for the alienated student to continue learning. Street academies offer individualized instruction, close student-teacher contacts, and variable schedules.			
Schools without walls. Instruction takes place at various locations in the community. Academic courses are modified to allow credit for mastering course objectives in a work, or other out-of-school, setting.			
Alternatives for ninth-graders. These programs take a variety of names — "Meaningful Other Person" (MOP) in one Granville County, N.C., school; or "Project Opportunity" in Newark, N.J. In the North Carolina school, officials assign a faculty member to provide guidance, praise, and encouragement as the student seeks to master the subject matter of the curriculum. In the New Jersey school, the ninth-graders attend small classes, get individualized attention, and are oriented for transition to high school.			
Programs to call back dropouts. To encourage young people who have already dropped out to come back and finish high school, school systems offer alternative programs with flexible scheduling. The North Education Center High School in Columbus, Ohio, is such a model. To further encourage former students to return, NEC High School also promises individualized attention, help with independent study, counseling, and job placement services. The class schedule is structured so that students can earn a half a credit in eight and a half weeks. The school has five terms and operates throughout the year.			
Alternatives for overage students. The more mature students who have fallen behind their cohorts often need alternative approaches to keep them in school or entice them to come back. South High School in Canton, Ohio, operates a school for overage students, married students, and those with financial needs who must work. This Program for Alternative and Cooperative Education (PACE) seeks to help each student fulfill academic requirements for graduation. A chief characteristic of PACE is individualized instruction. Preparation for an occupational future is a parallel characteristic.			

For our district this is practical doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation

Workshops instead of classrooms: The traditional classroom, with its emphasis on verbalism, recitation, and memory work — and overreliance on textbooks — unquestionably is not for the student at risk. Likely to be more successful is an alternative classroom management system which is task- and project-oriented. The Diversified Educational Experiences Program (DEEP) in Wichita, Kansas, is such a program. The classroom environment is that of a workshop; the role of the teacher that of adviser, consultant, and manager of learning systems.

Counseling approaches

Traditional counseling and guidance services vary in quality from district to district, from school to school. Providing students with information about colleges and universities and career choices is a time-honored assignment for school counselors and is as adequate as is the competencies of the counseling staffs.

Students at risk need something more and something different from traditional counseling. They need healthy self-concepts, heightened self-esteem. They need personalized programs for school achievement and for adjustment to school requirements. Administrators, therefore, give consideration to a reconstruction of counseling as it has been practiced in the past.

In the chart below, we list seven major counseling models. Check appropriate items in the columns to indicate which of these counseling models are practical and doable for you, which may need improvement, and which are being planned for future implementation.

Alternative models

For our district this is practical and doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation

High-risk counselors. As reported in Wake County, N.C., high-risk counselors function in middle and junior high schools to help identify at-risk middle-school students. Absenteeism, school failure, and grade retention are among criteria these counselors watch for in identifying at-risk students. High-risk counselors then propose interventions or strategies they believe will be most effective with the students. Interventions may include special student counseling, teacher-parent conferences, home visitation, and group counseling.

Retrained counselors. Traditional counselors and those who had their preparation more than a decade ago need inservice education on the problems and concerns of at-risk students. They also need help in surveying community resources and in establishing linkages with nontraditional resources for schooling potential dropouts and for referring them to community agencies for health, employment, and psychological services.

	For our district, this is practical doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation
Peer counseling. To carry on this effort, selected students should be enrolled in courses to help them develop listening and communications skills. Further, potential peer counselors need help in decision making and in developing sensitivity to problems of their peers. Once such skills are developed, peer counselors can help other students develop a sense of belonging and of usefulness. At its best, peer counseling is the exchange of healthy experiences in a nonthreatening environment.			
Using former dropouts as counselors. Dropouts who have reentered school often provide good role models for potential dropouts. They can offer living testimony to the consequences of leaving school before graduation.			
Counseling for parents. Parents of at-risk children can help their children stay in school provided the parents, themselves, are given help in guiding their children. Counseling can be with individual parents or with a parent groups.			
Counseling/rap room. This is a special room devoted to counseling and advising. It is a comfortable place, a friendly environment for troubled students.			
Student hotline. This is a telephone counseling service run by professional counselors either from school or community agencies. Students are encouraged to call about personal, school, or career questions. Hotline also serves as a referral service to hospitals, and mental health or employment agencies.			

Tutorial approaches

Tutoring is civilization's ancient and venerable method of passing on knowledge and skills from generation to generation. From time immemorial, the mother and father have passed on their skills in homemaking, earning a livelihood, and in craftsmanship by example, demonstraton, correcting errors, and reinforcing acceptable behavior in the young. Princes and kings have been educated by tutors in ancient Greece and Rome and in modern Europe and the Orient. Today we are rediscovering the value of this one-to-one, or small group, approach in helping at-risk students through the rough and tough patches of curriculum and school life.

The reservoir of potential tutors is large and may include students, professionals, parents, community volunteers, teachers, and now the computer. But tutoring has its own challenges. School districts that rely heavily on tutoring see to it that potential tutors are trained in the practice. Tutors need at least the following basic attributes and skills:

- Ability to recognize the level at which a student can successfully learn
- Skills in ensuring that each tutoring session is a satisfying and successful experience
- Ability to set short-term goals
- Ability to praise and reward effort and achievement.

In the chart below, we list six major tutoring models. Check appropriate items in the columns to indicate which of these counseling models are practical and doable for you, which may need improvement, and which are being planned for future implementation.

Alternative models

	For our district, this is practical and doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation
Teachers as tutors. If, as, and when classroom teachers undertake tutoring, they need refresher and inservice preparation for the assignment. Tutoring requires skills often distinct from those of classroom instruction. It calls for individual instruction, mastery of subject matter, and concern for the feelings and personal welfare of the student. The expert teacher-tutor not only raises academic achievement of the student, but also reduces feelings of alienation and anonymity sometimes experienced by students — feelings directly related to dropping out.			
Parents as tutors. After training, parents are often able to assume tutorial roles in schools, working with individual students or small groups. Some parents may do better tutoring students not related to them. But school officials should not overlook the great service parents can perform helping their children at home. Involving parents as helpers may also lead to greater public support of the public school generally and of dropout prevention efforts specifically.			
Peer tutors. Schools have experimented with a variety of peer tutoring. Research studies affirm general success with any one of the following approaches: 1) older students helping younger students; 2) able students helping those of lower achievement; 3) returned dropouts helping potential dropouts; 4) potential dropouts helping other students.			
Senior mentors. Senior citizens often provide a variety of resources useful in tutoring. Retired businessmen and businesswomen, former lawyers, engineers, computer specialists, doctors, and other professionals help students with school projects or improving academic skills.			
Career mentors. These are people in the community who are active and outstanding in professions, trades, or industry. A career mentor agrees to help an individual student or group of students to decide on career goals and to provide the students information on succeeding in the world of work.			
Microcomputers as tutors. Working a times with a teacher trained in computer skills, a potential dropout can receive substantial help from a microcomputer. Remediation of basic skills and renewed interest in academic work have been cited as results of such tutoring. Interactive video holds great promise for tutoring students.			

Involvement of Parents: Incentives for Students

Administrators use two potent additives to enhance their major approaches for preventing dropouts and bringing dropouts back to school: parental involvement and incentives for students.

Parents are almost indispensable.

Involving parents. The intelligent and cooperative parent acts as a force in helping students at risk, the AASA survey showed. And the most effective way to involve parents is by asking them to sign a contract under which the school and the home agree to do all they can to keep the student in school, administrators reported. Parent-school contracts on behalf of the student are used extensively in alternative, work-related, and teenage pregnancy programs.

To help parents carry out their obligations "to act as an intelligent force," school districts report the following types of activities:

Workshops for parents held at the school. These parent education ventures provide counseling on how to help students succeed in school, how to help students do their homework in positive environments, and how to monitor the student's work and progress.

Newsletters for the home. Effective newsletters are written simply, deal with how teachers teach, and what the home can do to help students learn. "Singularly effective," says the Florida state education agency, "are newsletters prepared with the help of students. By working on a newsletter, potential dropouts often become more dedicated to their school and are motivated to remain there."

Tours for parents. If held during the school day, parents have an opportunity to observe the environment in which their children learn. After-school tours can be used to tell parents about the curriculum, student clubs, sports, and the services available to students.

Volunteering. "The school that creates opportunities for parents to volunteer their services will develop parents with a strong commitment to keeping their children in school," says an information leaflet on volunteers developed by a large California school district. And opportunities for parent volunteer services are many: tutoring students; serving as resource experts in the classroom; and serving as aides in the library, office, or school laboratory.

Incentives that work.

Here is a culling of district practices involving awards, prizes, and other incentives to improve student attendance, raise achievement, and help keep students in school:

- "We have had good success with local businesses that donate prizes to individual students and home rooms with the most improved attendance records. . . ."
- "We often reward potential dropouts who are trying to succeed by giving them work in our business office. They tally the day's absences and some are proficient enough to call absent students' homes. . . ."
- "This practice works: We encourage potential dropouts to arrive in school regularly and on time by giving them early morning chores and assignments. . . ."
- "To reward potential dropouts for some achievement during the month, we invite them as special guests to a meeting that features short talks by successful alumni. . . ."
- "A visit to the office or business of a prominent alumnus is much appreciated by some potential dropouts. Such a visit bolsters pride of the individual student and also helps the student see how successful men and women work. . . ."
- "Field trips to local community colleges are our way of rewarding potential dropouts for some persistent effort in school. By becoming familiar with what goes on in a community college, some of our potential dropouts reported an incentive to finish high school so they can move on to the college campus. . . ."

Work-related / business partnership approaches

Work . . . work experience . . . career goals . . . career planning . . . jobs while learning. . . .

Programs and concepts associated with work provide a good measure of success for keeping students in school until graduation and for bringing them back if they have left school.

Work components are woven into nearly all high school alternative programs. They are recognized as essentials in counseling students at risk. Educators, business and industry leaders, and parents see work experience in school as one firm basis for preventing students from becoming permanent dropouts.

Schools, programs, and projects emphasizing work-related and business-partnership approaches run into the thousands, and they exist in nearly all school districts. One of the most celebrated of these operates in Atlanta, Georgia, at Rich's, a large inner-city department store that also serves (on one of its floors) as a public high school for some 100 students who have dropped out of school and are back to earn a high school diploma. The location is auspicious; students are close to working adults, meet with mentors who are store employees, and secure part-time employment. Called Rich's Academy, the facility and its program retain close to 80 percent of its students until graduation.

Other work-related projects that have achieved recognition are:

- The Dallas Out-of-School Cooperative Training Plan
- The Vocational Remedial Training Program for Alienated Youth in Parma, Ohio
- The Career Opportunity Center, Kansas City, Kansas
- The Special Learning and Behavior Problems Program in Austin, Minnesota
- The Career Intern Program in Philadelphia.

The concept that part-time work and part-time school can be a strong holding power for potential dropouts is being tested in Seattle, Washington, through the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP). Originally funded by the Ford Foundation, STEP is now sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, plus a consortium of foundations.

In addition to Seattle, STEP is being tried in Boston; Portland, Oregon; and in San Diego and Fresno, California. Eligible students are disadvantaged 14- and 15-year-olds who qualify for the federal Summer Youth Employment Training Program. Students attend basic skills classes and work part time for two summers. During their summer employment, students keep up with reading and math course work.

Characteristics of successful programs

While it would be hazardous to attempt a profile of the ideal work-related approach in preventing permanent dropouts, successful programs have some common, indispensable characteristics. They:

- Are set up in cooperation with business and industry leaders.
- Employ community and industry resources.
- Involve intensive student counseling.
- Call for practical work experience, often paid.
- Are paralleled by training in basic academic skills needed for success on a job.

In addition, work-related approaches use classrooms that are often upgraded; are based on written training plans between the school, student, parents, and employer; may utilize open-entry, open-exit privileges; and often include faculty efforts to foster positive self-concepts.

Among options for school districts are the following models. Check appropriate items in the columns on the next page to indicate which of these work-related models are practical or doable for your district, which may need improvement, and which are being planned for the future.

> *"At-risk behavior comes primarily from low self-esteem. Let's face it: In the middle school years, kids have a hard time liking themselves. Everyone is either over-developed or under-developed. They are neither children nor adults. It is very difficult to develop self-esteem."*
>
> —George Melton
> Assistant Executive Director
> National Association of Secondary
> School Principals

Helpful AASA Resource

More facts, myths, and intervention policies and programs are provided in a new AASA publication, *Teenage Suicide.* Sample assessment tools and steps for schools, parents, and communities to take to prevent suicide are included, as well as suggestions on what to do when a student takes his or her own life.

Work-related / business partnership models

	For our district, this is practical and doable	We need to expand/improve/refine this plan	Now being planned for future implementation
Extended school day. North Carolina state education officials recommend this plan because "it provides students with altenative means of meeting requirements for high school graduation." Among the plan's elements are: open enrollment throughout the school year; classes scheduled in late afternoon and evening to accommodate working students; credits for successful employment that count toward graduation.			
Diversified cooperative training. In this plan high school students of employable age are trained in a variety of occupations. The program uses community businesses and industries as training agencies. The school day is divided into classroom study and work in a chosen occupation.			
Cities in schools. This is a partnership among the private business sector, human and social service agencies, the school, and parents. The school is the focal point for integrating community resources into the education and training of the student. All the partners work toward supporting student success in school.			
Adopt-a-school. This is an effort to involve the business community in the activities of the public schools. The business partner provides the adopted school with assistance in implementing learning activities by sharing expertise and providing supplies and equipment; and takes various actions to recognize student achievement.			
Career shadowing. Students are matched with sponsors who work in occupations of interest to the student. The student shadows his sponsor — who may be an employer or an employee — for a specified period of time. This experience provides the student with information about a particular career choice and the skills, training, and preparatory education that the occupation requires.			
Career and job fairs. These projects require that local business and industry representatives set up displays on school grounds or other facilities to inform the students of possible career choices. In connection with these exhibits, recruiters from business and industry interview students and often make plans to hire them for future work. Career and job fairs help students plan their educational programs and develop realistic perceptions of the world of work.			

Appendices

Appendix A

Review: Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged

A Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development

In the illuminating report, "Children in Need," the focus is on the educationally disadvantaged — "the 30 percent of children facing major risk of educational failure and lifelong dependency."

According to the CED report, "Children who are deprived of a decent education are disadvantaged in a society that requires high levels of literacy and skills to succeed. Children who are not adequately served by the public school system are truly in need . . . We must view quality education as an investment, not an expense."

Three major recommendations or "investment strategies," are seen as essential for bringing the educationally disadvantaged into society's productive center:

- Early and sustained intervention
- Fundamental restructuring of the school system
- Retention and reentry.

Prevention through early intervention would include such efforts as prenatal/postnatal care for pregnant teens and other high-risk mothers, parenting education, and quality child care and preschool programs. The report calls for response to the needs of the "whole child," from early on through adulthood.

It also calls for restructuring the foundations of the education forces and rethinking the relationship of the school to the community, stating: "Too many schools that serve disadvantaged populations are opting for control, rather than education, magnifying the alientation often experienced by the poor and minorities." Any restructuring plan, the report suggests, should be predicated on school-based management, with shared decision making among principals, teachers, parents, and students. Flexibility and innovation in curriculum, teaching method and organization are important.

Additional recommendations include hiring and supporting teachers who are committed and experienced in dealing with disadvantaged or troubled children; smaller schools and smaller class size; and support for preschool and child care programs by the school system. School-based support systems should include health; nutrition; psychological, career, and family counseling services; and increased emphasis on extracurricular activities.

The third major area of study in *Children in Need* focuses on retention and reentry for those students at risk of foregoing their education. Flexibility and case-by-case programs permeate the recommendations: combine work experience with education in basic skills; improve motivation, skills, and self-esteem; and provide funding continuity and long-term evaluation of programs and students.

"Failure to educate is the true expense for both society and individuals. The most recent estimates suggest that each year's class of dropouts will cost the nation more than $240 billion in lost earnings and foregone taxes over their lifetimes. This does not include the billions more for crime control and welfare, health care, and other social services that this group will cost the nation."

Demonstration of the soundness and success of investing in such human programs is summarized well by the CED report in a cost-effectiveness chart obtained from the "Report of the Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families," U.S. House of Representatives:

Preschool Education increased school success for 10.2 million children between ages 3 to 5 in 1983 under the Head Start program, and returned $4.75 on a $1.00 investment, because of lower costs of special education, public assistance, and crime. In 1985, fewer than 1 of every 5 eligible children, however, participated in Head Start.

Compensatory Education, through Chapter I services, under the LEA Basic Grant Program, provided achievement gains and maintenance of gains in reading and mathematics to 4.7 million in 1982-83 — an estimated 50 percent of those in need. Investment of $500 for a year of compensatory education can save $3,000 for the cost of repeating a grade.

Youth Employment and Training, under the Job Corps (83,426 in 1983-84); Job Training Partnership Act (240,000), and the Summer Youth Program (753,000 youths) provided gains in employability, wages, and success while in school and afterwards. Job Corps returned $7,400 per participant, compared to $5,000 in program costs (in 1977 dollars). The Fiscal 1982 service year costs for Youth Employment Training Program (YTEP) were $4,700; participants had annualized earnings gains of $1,810. Annalized numbers of unemployed persons ages 16 to 21 in 1984 were 2,278,000.

Who is responsible for aiding children at risk? Many institutions, both public and private, must work in concert, says the CED. Increased federal funding for the successful Chapter I and Head Start programs is more crucial than ever. Whereas the states have had a positive effect on educational quality, CED reaffirms the need for the states "to resist the temptation to supplant local authority to a substantial degree. . . . Individual schools should be provided with enough discretionary power so that programs are kept small in scale, remain manageable and flexible, and are able to be individualized.

". . . business must become a driving force in the community on behalf of public education and a prime advocate of educational initiatives for disadvantaged youngsters." Business should take the lead in supporting more funding and in advocating the rebuilding of older urban schools. "Business has an important stake in helping public schools improve the way they prepare young people for the future, and it has demonstrated its commitment to educational excellence through a broad spectrum of partnerships with schools. It is now incumbent upon business to focus its collaborative activities more sharply on disadvantaged children, so that quality education is available to every child, and every child is prepared to succeed in school."

Appendix B

Project Literacy U.S. PLUS

Project Literacy U.S., PLUS, a joint public service campaign of Capital Cities/American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., and the Public Broadcasting Service, with the support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, was launched in 1985 to begin solving America's "hidden" problem — its 23 million functionally illiterate (those adults who have skills at or below a fourth-grade level).

Through on-air programs, television specials, hotlines, and task forces, these organizations hope to stamp out illiteracy's cost in human potential and the loss to society of adults whose minimal or nonexistent reading and writing skills account for (according to PLUS reports):

- Up to 75 percent of the unemployed
- More than one-third of mothers receiving support from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program
- 85 percent of the juveniles who appear in court
- An estimated 60 percent of prison inmates
- Nearly 40 percent of minority youth.

No matter what the cause of illiteracy, individuals trapped in it are living without skills to cope with life at its most basic level and are robbed of hope and self-respect. The cost to this country, due to lost industrial productivity, unrealized taxes, welfare, and prison and social expenses is in the billions each year.

The ABC/PBS aim with PLUS began with recognition of the problem and its amplification. Solving the problem has been aided through PLUS support to hundreds of communities in their individual efforts, forming a network of over 325 literacy task forces nationwide.

Through the *Information and Resources for Task Forces* manual, produced with a grant from the National Commission for Employment Policy, PLUS has provided an incredibly comprehensive and specific set of guidelines for those wishing to tackle illiteracy. Any group wanting to start their own task force will find everything here, from detailed assessment procedures for their communities, to suggested program structure, job descriptions, budget, recruitment activities, and public awareness. Successful model programs are studied in detail, emphasizing how all available community resources are interwoven. For example: one community model includes:

- Tutoring in 10 Beaver County, Pennsylvania, libraries.
- Free English classes at Pennsylvania State University.
- Citizenship preparation, a 10-week class.
- Basic literacy classes and one-on-one tutoring at the Beaver County jail.

In another model program called ABLE (Adult Basic Literacy Education), Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina, has had more than 3,000 students over age 18 and 400 tutors since it began in 1983. Operating with five centers, ABLE has four central goals:

- To provide instruction for students in reading, writing, and math skills so that they can progress to an eighth-grade level faster than would be expected in other literacy programs.
- To retain adults in the ABLE program longer than traditional programs.
- To provide support, instruction, and referral services to assist adults in meeting their lifetime goals.

PLUS underscores the need for employers to understand the importance of literacy in the work force. Business, according to the PLUS task force literature, can help identify and assist employees in meeting the literacy challenge.

The Polaroid Corporation is an example, with its in-house Fundamental Skills Program. After assessment for basic skills required for each of its jobs, the company provides voluntary basic skills services in reading, writing, math, and problem solving. Another example is Planters Nuts which, since 1978, has offered employees individualized education when reading skills fall below the eighth-grade level. Upon completion of the four-hour course, Planters pays an employee for two hours' work.

Many companies have met the literacy challenge by initiating joint projects with local schools, points out PLUS. The exciting "Book It!" program, sponsored by Pizza Hut, is one example. Gift certificates for free pizzas at national Pizza Hut franchises are awarded elementary school students who achieve reading goals each month. Over 7 million students have been involved so far.

Ultimately, it is hoped that a strong alliance between businesses and schools to motivate, challenge, and assist students at risk, and cooperation among all levels of government under the auspices of such well-directed service campaigns as PLUS, will provide America the productive, self-fulfilled workforce it needs.

Appendix C

Statement on At-Risk Youth: Forum of Educational Organization Leaders

The Forum of Educational Organization Leaders, representing 11 of the nation's foremost educational leadership groups, issued a statement expressing alarm about the increasing numbers of at-risk students who are entering the nation's schools.

Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, who serves as moderator of the Forum, presented the results of a study that points out the growing challenge to the nation and its schools in dealing with at-risk students. During a June 1, 1987, news conference in Washington, Hodgkinson presented the Forum statement titled, "Meeting the Needs of Children and Youth At Risk of School Failure . . . The National Imperative."

"While the schools of our nation have been successful in serving the needs of our changing society, they now face another challenge posed by the growing number of children and youth at risk of failure," Hodgkinson said, quoting the report. "As one reads the reform reports and legislation, it is clear that little attention is given to the radical change in the number and nature of the young people who are in, and will be entering our schools in the next decade," he added.

The Forum statement highlights these facts:

- 40 percent of the poor in America are children.
- 24 percent of all children live below the poverty line.
- Nearly 60 percent of children born in 1983 will live with only 1 parent before age 18; 90 percent of these children will live in female-headed families; and a majority will be families with incomes under $10,000.
- The teen birth rate in the United States is *twice* that of any other western nation.
- Today's children come to school speaking over 100 different languages and dialects.
- Nearly 40 percent of all public school students are minorities.
- Since 1960, delinquency rates of young people ages 10 to 17 increased by 130 percent.
- This nation has the highest rate of teenage drug use of any industrialized nation, with over 61 percent of all high school students having used drugs.

"These are some of the challenges schools face, and high graduation standards and other stiffer school standards do not address these conditions. New Policies and new resources are necessary to enable *all* students to meet higher standards," the Forum statement noted. "For many students, reform to date resembles the track coach who, when confronted by a jumper unable to jump at five feet, tries an experiment by putting the bar at six feet without providing new or extra coaching or help," Hodgkinson said.

"If we wish to maintain or improve our present standard of living, we must work smarter. It is clear that it is not possible to succeed if only middle class people from stable families work smarter. The ability, the skill, the capacity to work smarter must, for the first time in human history, be characteristic of the mass of our population. We simply cannot achieve those objectives so long as we have so many youth in such significant jeopardy," Hodgkinson said, quoting the statement.

The Forum statement provides a reminder that "35 years ago, there were 17 people working for each retiree. By 1992, there will be only three. Clearly all three must be very productive. However, at least 1 of those 3 will be a minority. Those who are minorities are disproportionately represented among those with whom schools have been, and continue to be, least successful."

To deal with the challenges posed by at-risk students, the Forum statement suggests a number of objectives, including: changes in federal, state, and local educational policies; curriculum modifications; alterations in the time and place where education occurs; different relationships between the school and a host of other institutions and agencies in the community; strengthening of parent/school relationships; more extensive and different pupil services; more measurable accountability for student learning; greater fiscal resources; and changes in the expectations of education throughout the school hierarchy.

The Forum calls for a policy commitment to at-risk children and youth at the local, state, and federal levels. "Never before has such a broad guarantee of educational services been made to individual children as an investment in the nation's future," the report states.

In its statement, the Forum calls for a "policy guarantee" that would include the following components:

A functional definition of children and youth at risk of school failure. For example, for young children, any child living below the poverty line could be defined as being at risk. Differnt criteria, such as reading performance or school attendance, could be used for older children and youth.

Identification and assessment procedures. The actual educational service needs of a child or group of children would be determined through such procedures.

Program prescription and delivery. In some cases, programs would focus on groups of children and, in other cases, on individuals. Programming would need to start as early as possible, be connected to the home, and include individual attention to children and youth. Program delivery would be within the regular school setting.

Monitoring and enforcement provisions. These procedures would ensure that students would not "fall between the cracks."

- Resource enhancement. The higher cost of these guarantees of service would be acknowledged.
- An end-result commitment. As Eugene Lang did in the context of 30 Harlem sixth graders, our new policy commitment would guarantee that all high school graduates meeting certain criteria would be guaranteed the opportunity for either an initial job or post-secondary education. The criteria should include: certain performance criteria such as a 75 percent average; attendance criteria such as 95 percent in one's senior year; and behavior criteria such as having provided 100 hours of community service.

The Forum has called on law-makers

throughout the nation to craft, pass, and implement a legislative policy and resource commitment of the scope, quality, and character suggested to deal with the needs of children and youth at risk."

Member of the Forum of Educational Organization Leaders include: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), American Association of School Administrators (AASA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Education Commission of the States (ECS), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National School Boards Association (NSBA), National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA), and National Education Association (NEA).

For further information, contact:
Dr. Harold Hodgkinson,
Director of Demographic Policy Programs
Forum of Educational Organization Leaders
202/939-9317

Appendix D

Comments on At-Risk Youth from FOEL Organizations

The following are comments prepared by some of the members of the Forum of Educational Organization Leaders (FOEL) in relation to the 1987 Forum statement entitled, "Meeting the Needs of Children and Youth At Risk of School Failure." Each comment includes: the name of the organization, an indication of the person issuing the statement, and the name of the person to contact for more information.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)

The recent Forum statement suggests the need for significant new investments in the education of better prepared and motivated teachers to work with at-risk people. It also calls for the realignment of teacher education programs to place greater emphasis on individual learners and their characteristics. These are important challenges for meeting the needs of children and youth at risk.

For information: Penelope Earley, Director, Public Relations; 202/293-2450.

American Association of School Administrators (AASA)

Statement by Richard D. Miller,
Executive Director

Children and youth who are at risk are a time bomb ticking in American society. We are concerned that more than 24 percent of children and youth in our nation are living in poverty. We cannot afford to have those who will inherit the leadership of our nation plunged into a life of failure and limited productivity. Every American should be committed to ensuring an excellent education for all children and youth because, if we aren't, every American will pay the economic price. As we approach the 21st century, one of our greatest challenges as a nation will be to provide opportunity and encouragement for students at risk.

For information: Gary Marx, Associate Executive Director; 703/528-0700.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Statement by Albert Shanker, President

The American Federation of Teachers supports the FEOL call for concerted efforts to meet the needs of at-risk children and youth. These children are the future of our nation, but they are also the children whose schools too often have failed. The true test of our commitment to serving all children is in rebuilding — not simply repairing — schools. To meet individual needs, schools must be restructured to fit students, rather than making students "fit" the schools.

For further information, contact: Marilyn Rauth, Director, Educational Issues Dept., 202/879-4400

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

Statement by William F. Pierce,
former Executive Director

Whether one approaches the issue of the education of students at risk of school failure from a position of social justice or one of economic necessity, it is clear that the needs of these young people are not being adequately met. It also is clear that the failure to do so will have serious social, political, and economic consequences. The Council of Chief State School Officers strongly endorses the national imperative on meeting the needs of at-risk students called for by the Forum of Educational Organization Leaders. The Council has made this issue its central focus and encourages other organizations to carefully examine how they may better assist these young people to become responsible, productive, and participating citizens.

For information: Cynthia Brown, Director, Resource Center on Educational Equity; 202/393-8161.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

Statement by Samuel G. Sava,
Executive Director

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of getting at-risk children off on the right foot in quality preschool programs. The Head Start program has proven beyond question that low-income and culturally deprived preschoolers — historically at the greatest risk of school failure — tend to stay in school longer and become more stable and productive adults than their non-Head Start peers. We must build on that experience with well-conceived programs that provide a rich environment in which all young children can grow, learn, and succeed.

For information: Ted Greenleaf, Director of Communications; 703/684-3345.

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

Statement by Phyllis Blaunstein,
Executive Director

The waves of education reform must not leave increasing numbers of our young people behind, caught in a backwater of educational and economic hopelessness. Advancement of what has been called "an educational renaissance" will be impossible if the opportunities for learning, for growth, and for fulfillment are not extended to all students — not just those served best by the current system. Such a "renaissance" would be hollow indeed and full of bitter irony for those who have been left out of the quest for excellence. Education policy makers at every level must respond to unlock the excellence that lies within each child. To do otherwise would be a repudiation of all that educators stand for and all that our nation can be. We can, and we must, act.

For further information: Tim Callahan, Director of Communications; 703/684-4000.

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

Statement by Scott D. Thomson,
Executive Director

The Forum statement shows the way to replace "students at risk" with "students at success." It provides a blueprint of opportunity for our entire nation, because we cannot afford the economic drag of inadequate schooling for one-third of our population. If we accept this special challenge of our time, if we face the need squarely, then our nation's future will benefit. If we falter in this quest for broad opportunity across all American society, then the life chances of our successors will suffer. We simply cannot let that happen, as individual citizens or as a people.

For information: Scott D. Thompson, Executive Director; 703/860-0200.

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)

Statement from Ann P. Kahn, President

The 6.1 million-member National PTA joins the other members of the Forum in their aggressive commitment of leadership and resources to meet the needs of the growing number of at-risk children. While many parents around the country are demanding a greater voice for their children related to educational governance, policy making and curricular decision making, parents of at-risk children are often sorely neglected educationally and under-represented politically. We would hope that, in our rush toward educational reform, we will protect those children who are the most difficult to educate from falling between the quality education cracks.

At the same time, public schools have a responsibility of reaching out to the parents of at-risk children. Parent and family involvement can no longer be the stepchild of educational decision making. It must be treated as a most critical component of the instructional program. While the national PTA believes that high educational standards must be maintained, we also believe that "rigor" should not be the rationale to kick hard to educate children out of school; that higher academic standards not be construed to mean education for just "the best"; that minimal competency tests be misued to fail students without providing appropriate remediation; and that children who do not have parents to speak with a loud voice for them should not be denied the same education as those who do. The challenge in our quest for equal educational opportunity is clear — the assurance by all levels of educational policy making that all children receive an excellent education.

For information: Ann P. Kahn, President, or Arnold Fege, Director of Governmental Relations; 202/822-7878.

National Education Association (NEA)

Statement by Mary Hatwood Futrell,
President

The second wave of education reform must — of necessity — address the needs of at-risk students if we are to achieve our national goals in the future. As we seek to restructure our schools and our teaching profession to yield a better educated populace, we must seek ways to identify — at the earliest possible moment — those who are falling through the learning cracks. We must be able to provide them with effective learning vehicles. And we must be prepared to meet the policy and program challenges these matters will demand. If we act in the common good now, our collective future will be brighter. For every moment we hesitate to act, we may, in fact, not only condemn another youth to educational failure, but condemn our nation as well. This we cannot afford.

For information: Stephanie Schoumacher or Elvira Crocker, Communications Specialists; 202/822-7208.

National School Boards Association (NSBA)

Statment by Jonathan T. Howe,
then President

We must address the issues arising from the enormously changed America which the FEOL report accurately describes as looming on the horizon. But, seeking remedies from the federal and state government is not enough. We in the local communities — school board members, superintendents, other administrators, and teachers — must assume an active, constructive, and cooperative leadership role in bringing about the changes called for in the report. We must produce results in the schools where education really occurs. Our preeminent responsiblity is to produce, nurture, and sustain educational excellence and equity in the public schools.

For information: Thomas A. Shannon, Executive Director; 703/838-6722

Appendix E

Nurturing of Youth in Other Countries: Youth Policies and Practices in Selected Countries

The William T. Grant Foundation, Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship

In this report on Youth and America's Future, by Rosemary George, the approaches of 11 industrialized countries in preparing young people for adulthood are examined. The study concludes that the United States takes a less comprehensive position on its youth than most other industrialized nations. A greater emphasis on youth has led to the adoption of national youth policies in some nations.

According to the report, "In most other countries, particularly those facing high levels of youth unemployment, a major strategy shift has rapidly increased manpower employment and training programs to sustain and raise work qualification levels. Unlike the U.S., however, these education, employment, and training policies are seen as vital components in a broader effort to support *overall youth development,* not merely youth employability." Specific examples given include:

- In Britain, Canada and elsewhere (with the notable exception of the United States) families traditionally receive cash child allowances. In West Germany, for example, families with children up to age 16 and until 27, if they remain in school, receive tax-free child benefits.

- In Finland, the government subsidizes up to 65 percent of the operating costs of community youth boards — which sponsor a broad range of activities, including street work, skills training, sports, and recreation.
- In Japan, participation in youth activities is seen as an important way to develop character. Fifteen million young people participate in programs under an umbrella group promoted and assisted by the government.

Former U.S. Commissioner of Education, who chairs the Commision on Youth and America's Future, observed in his foreword to the study that Americans have only recently begun to be "aware of the connection between what happens in the classrooms and employment and training programs of a nation and the state of that country's productive capacity."

For information: The William T. Grant Foundation, Commission on Youth & America's Future, 1001 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036-5541

Appendix F

AASA-NASBE Joint Statement on Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in late 1987 released a joint statement aimed at preventing one of the factors that put students at risk: sexual abuse of children. The statement, which the organizations hope will result in more formal, strengthened, and widely communicated policies, includes guidelines for local school districts on staff hiring procedures, the reporting and handling of allegations of sexual abuse, and ways to deal with the outcomes of investigations.

According to the joint statement, policies should meet several criteria:

- Apply to all categories of school staff.
- Center on the problem of sexual abuse and molestation of children.
- Provide for due process for staff accused of sexual abuse.
- Prevent adults convicted of child abuse from obtaining employment in another school system or state.

States are encouraged to provide safeguards within their licensing procedures to screen for criminal records and use the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) to ascertain if disciplinary action has been taken against a prospective teacher in another state. In addition, states are encouraged to disseminate information on the conviction of school employees for sexual abuse to all public and private schools, as well as to join and participate in NASDTEC information sharing.

Appendix G

Developing an At-Risk Policy

When developing an at-risk policy, school leaders will want to first assess certain facts for their particular district, including:

- How many students are currently dropping out of school and at what grade levels?
- What percentage of the total enrollment is this?
- To what extent can the dropout rate be reduced?
- On what schedule is the reduction to take place?

Included in the assessment or background information should be data on current programs and approaches. Information on the dropout programs that are recommended should also be detailed.

Preparing this information may take weeks or months, and so will the process of broad adoption of so important a policy. Teachers, principals, and community leaders should have ample opportunity to take part in the discussion preceding board approval.

Sample Policy

Whereas approximately ____________________ school-age students in the ______________________________ school district are dropping out of their educational programs; and

WHEREAS, the cumulative percentage rate of dropouts is ________________, the ____________________ Board of Education recognizes its responsibility to maintain a continuing and accurate accounting for all school-age children in the district, including those who are identified as dropouts; and

WHEREAS, the ______________________________ Board of Education ackowledges that it must assume a greater responsibilty for providing appropriate and meaningful educational experiences for all pupils, including realistic alternatives to traditional school programs; and

WHEREAS, the ______________________________ Board of Education recognizes that prevention must begin in the early years of a child's education; and

WHEREAS, the ______________________________ Board of Education recognizes that the motivation and circumstances that induce a student to drop out are many and varied; and

WHEREAS, the ____________________________ Board of Education, as the primary advocate for every pupil, acknowledges the responsiblity to help make a successful school experience available for all who establish membership;

NOW, THEREFORE, the ______________________________ Board of Education does hereby resolve to establish ______________________ dropout programs by ____________________, 198 ______. These programs will be established principally to reduce the district's dropout rate to ______________ percent by ______________________________ __________, 198_____.

—based on material provided by the Ohio State Board of Education

Other AASA Critical Issues Reports

Teaching Thinking and Reasoning Skills: Problems and Solutions. Shows how teaching thinking and reasoning can be incorporated into the curriculum. Reviews the research and explores programs now at work in schools across the nation. (80pp; 1987; $13.95; Stock #021-00175).

Staff Development: Problems and Solutions. This outstanding publication will help you improve your professional development program for all staff. Exemplary programs are included. (80 pp; 1986; $13.95; Stock #021-00164.)

Promoting Health Education in Schools: Problems and Solutions. An informative overview of both the problems and prospects for school health education. (68pp; 1985; $13.95; Stock #021-00152).

Raising Standards in Schools: Problems and Solutions. Includes results of the studies for improving standards and tells how to involve key community groups in achieving quality education. (88pp; 1985; $13.95; Stock #021-00145).

Improving Math & Science Education: Problems and Solutions. Includes examples of how districts are improving math and science education; lists of booklets and other materials developed for grades K-12. (92pp; 1985; $13.95; Stock #021-00131).

High Tech for Schools: Problems and Solutions. Details planning models; examines "computer literacy"; and offers advice on hardware, personnel and staff development, software, and uses of computers in administration and special education. Also discusses cable television, electronic networks, and videodiscs. (96pp; 1984; $12.95; Stock #021-00122).

The Role of the Principal in Effective Schools: Problems and Solutions. Details the principal's role as instructional leader and manager; training, selection, and evaluation of principals; and how the superintendent/board help principals become more effective. (96pp; 1983; $12.95; Stock #021-00839).

Planning for Tomorrow's Schools: Problems and Solutions. Examines the ingredients of effective planning. Offers planning models and checklists; advice on involving staff and community and setting goals and objectives; information demographics, politics, finance, and attracting good teachers. (80pp; 1983; $12.95; Stock #021-00832).

Building Morale . . . Motivating Staff: Problems and Solutions. Identifies morale builders and morale killers. Includes case studies of districts with excellent morale; tips on inservice, communications, evaluation, and managing conflict (80pp; 1983; $11.95; Stock #021-00834).

Teaching Writing: Problems and Solutions. Describes successful writing programs, how to teach students to use the writing process, tips on inservice for teachers, the principal's roles, and how to evaluate grade student writing. (96pp; 1982; $11.95; Stock #021-00901).

School Budgeting: Problems and Solutions. Describes making the budget an integral part of the school program; budgeting methods; planning ahead; and primers on finance campaigns, PR, negotiations, and lobbying. (72pp; 1982; $10.95; Stock #021-00900).

Declining Enrollment-closing Schools: Problems and Solutions. Details lessons learned about declining enrollment. Selected as "must reading" by the National School Boards Association. (88pp; 1981; $10.95; Stock #021-00336).

Collective Bargaining: Problems and Solutions. Selected "must reading" by the National School Boards Association. (95pp; 1981; $10.95; Stock #021-00330).

Student Discipline: Problems and Solutions. Selected "must reading" by the National School Boards Association. (80pp; 1980; $9.95; Stock #021-00334).

How Schools Can Save $$: Problems and Solutions. Includes suggestions and case studies on cutting the costs of staffing, fringe benefits, energy, and insurance. (80pp; 1980; $8.95; Stock #021-00333).

Teacher Competency: Problems and Solutions. Selected "must reading" by the National School Boards Association. (80pp; 1980; $8.95; Stock #021-00332).

Keeping Students in School: Problems and Solutions. Offers help to school districts facing staff dismissal in cases of incompetence, declining enrollment, or budget problems. (80pp; 1978; $8.95; Stock #021-00512).

The Competency Movement: Problems and Solutions. Explains the pros and cons of the minimum competency movement. Includes guidelines (92pp; 1978; $8.95; Stock #021-00510).

School Energy Crisis: Problems and Solutions. Describes solutions, including energy audits, transportation tips. (88pp; 1977; $8.95; Stock #021-00380).

Discount and Ordering Information

Order from the American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209-9988. To order a single copy, please add $3.50 for postage and handling. Orders for less than $20 must be accompanied by payment in full. Discount on any one Critical Issues Report: two to nine copies, 10% discount. Write for prices of 10 or more copies. Please indicate stock numbers on orders.

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